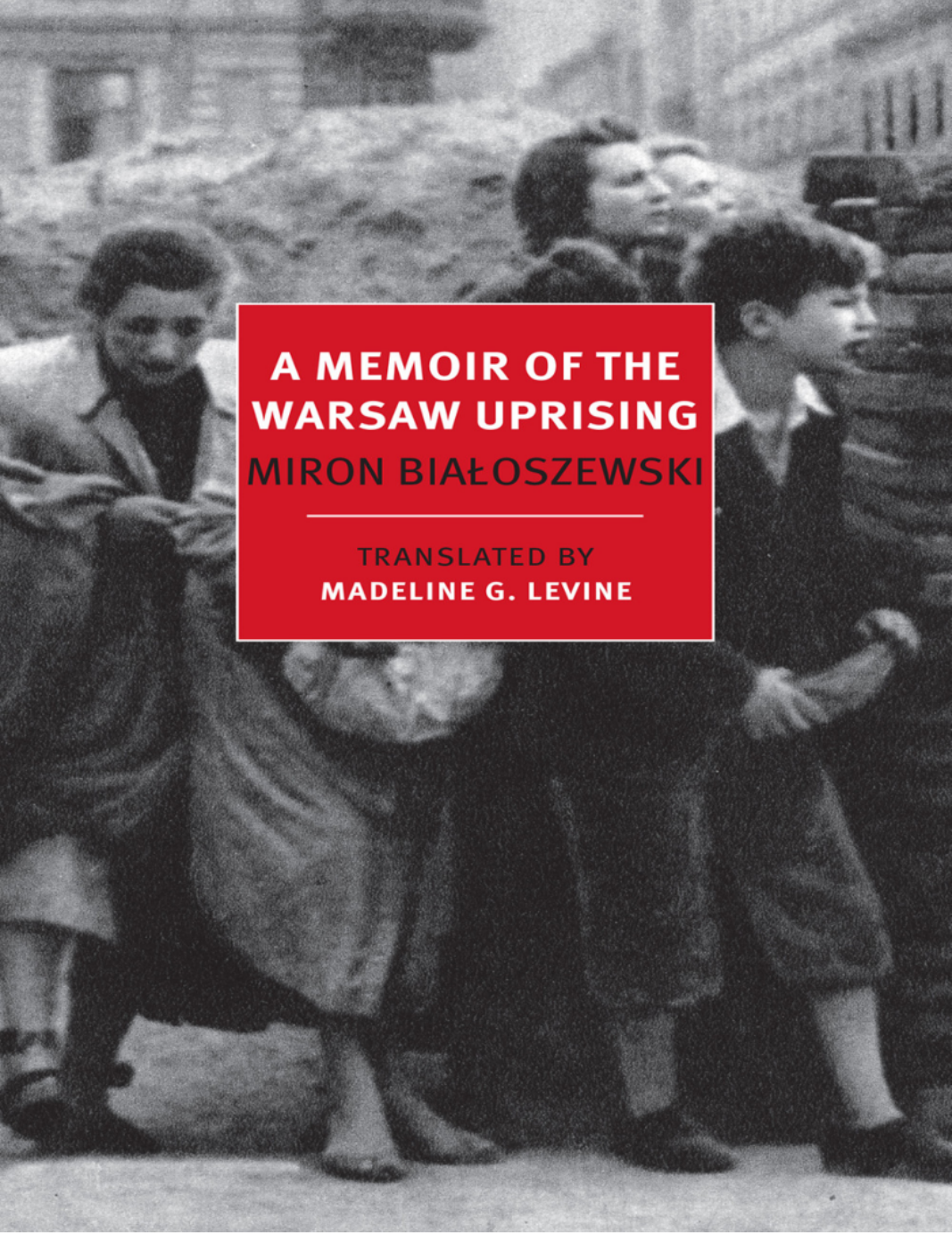

A MEMOIR OF THE WARSAW UPRISING

MIRON BIAŁOSZEWSKI

TRANSLATED BY
MADELINE G. LEVINE

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Annotation

This book is both a work of memory and a work about memory. Miron Bialoszewski (1922-83), the great avant-garde Polish poet, memorializes the doomed uprising of the Polish population against their Nazi masters which began on August 1, 1944, and was eventually abandoned on October 2, 1944, with the physical destruction of Warsaw, street by street and house by house, and the slaughter of 200,000 civilians.

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Miron Bialoszewski

A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MIRON BIAŁOSZEWSKI (1922–1983) was born in Warsaw, the son of a postal clerk. During the German occupation of Poland in World War II, he studied Polish literature in an underground school, though he never obtained any kind of degree. Not a combatant, he was deported to a German work camp following the Warsaw Uprising, escaped after a month and, as the war drew to its end, returned to his devastated city. Białoszewski worked as a journalist, writing poetry at night, though it was not until 1956 that his first volume of poetry, *Obroty rzeczy* (*The Revolution of Things*), appeared to great acclaim. Additional volumes of poetry and short prose texts followed, while Białoszewski also wrote plays for and acted with the collaborative and experimental Tarczyńska Street Theater. *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* came out in 1970.

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE RECEPTION of the original 1970 publication of Miron Białoszewski's *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* (*A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*) by readers and critics in Poland and the Polish diaspora was divided. Understood by many as a major literary event thanks to the author's bold rejection of unthinking nationalist fervor and powerful deployment of the norms of spoken language, the memoir was condemned by others as a blasphemous mockery of a revered moment in national history, the mockery made worse by the author's rejection of any hint of rhetorical pomposity. The functional prosaic title of the book appears to promise a work of unambiguous content: a recounting of a major historical event — the Warsaw Uprising of 1944—as recollected by a participant in that event. But Białoszewski's memoir is not the straightforward narrative its simple title suggests.

If we can divide memoir literature into two basic categories — one, the public figure's review of events in the public domain, often written with an eye to perpetuating a particular interpretation of those events, and the other, the more private self-revelations of the memoirist who seeks in the past a clue to his own personality and career — we can say that Białoszewski's memoir partakes of qualities from each of these categories. His subject is a major historical event, but he was not a public figure when he participated in it. When he came to write his memoir some twenty years after the fact, his fame was as a private man of letters, yet his return to the past is not primarily a search for self-knowledge nor an effort to reveal to the public the sources of his art. Rather, *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* is a nonfictional literary work that is deeply revisionist both in its presentation of the Warsaw Uprising and in its approach to the memoir genre.

The author of this controversial memoir was born in Warsaw in 1922 and made his home there until his death in 1983. Białoszewski was seventeen years old when the Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and twenty-two during the Warsaw Uprising. He began to write during the German occupation. These bare biographical facts are shared by a generation of Polish writers who were born during the 1920s and who came to maturity during the Second World War. They grew up during Poland's short-lived era of independence, which spanned the years between the Treaty of Versailles and the Nazi invasion. The spirit of national revival that marked the early years of the Polish Republic faltered under the anxious uncertainty of the 1930s and collapsed during the more than

five years of occupation.

The crucial experience in the lives of the generation to which Białoszewski belongs was the traumatic loss of a normal youth during a period when violent death was an ever-present possibility. Old enough to have absorbed the traditional Polish Catholic patriotism, members of this generation emerged from the war distrusting the tradition-sanctioned slogans and philosophies they had been raised on, substituting for positive beliefs an attitude of moral relativism. The grim experiences of their young adulthood left an indelible mark on the literary output of this generation, which includes, among other writers familiar to readers of their works in English translation, such giants of twentieth-century Polish letters as Tadeusz Różewicz and Tadeusz Borowski. Białoszewski bears a family resemblance to these authors in that, like them, he is obsessed with the fragility of civilization and displays little if any faith in the durability of cultural and moral codes. Like them, he expresses his disaffection by rejecting the traditional standards of aesthetics in order to seek a more appropriate style for his fundamental skepticism.

Throughout Białoszewski's poetry and prose (the boundaries between these two categories are often blurred) there is a consistent thematic concentration on simple objects and personal events that are outside the mainstream of traditional poetic subject matter.[1] His poems in praise of such domestic articles as slotted spoons, stoves, chairs, and quilts are typical of this attitude. His poetic iconoclasm, manifested by a disdain for conventional language as well as subject matter, aroused highly partisan feelings among Polish critics and, on more than one occasion, the censor's insistence on adherence to grammatical correctness.

The language of his memoir, like that of his poems, is unpolished, abrupt, colloquial; the syntax is fragmentary and distorted. Białoszewski plays with language, not, it would seem, with the aim of renewing the poetic medium but out of an abiding lack of faith in the received literary language and outright rejection of a politicized bureaucratic dialect—*nowa mowa*, the Polish communist version of Orwell's Newspeak. His poetics and the outlook it expresses are minimalist, demanding no overarching traditions or philosophy, nothing, indeed, beyond the concrete realities of daily life and speech. The following poem, in Czesław Miłosz's translation, is characteristic:

AND EVEN, EVEN IF THEY TAKE AWAY MY STOVE
My Inexhaustible Ode to Joy
I have a stove
similar to a triumphal arch!
They take away my stove
similar to a triumphal arch!!

Give me back my stove
similar to a triumphal arch!!!
They took it away.
What remains is
a grey
naked
hole.
And this is enough for me;
grey naked hole.
grey naked hole.
greynakedhole.[2]

During the years when he was beginning to achieve fame as a poet, Białoszewski was well-known in Warsaw as the director of a small avant-garde theater that was housed in his two-room apartment. There is a striking description of this Teatr Osobny (Private Theater) by the American columnist Joseph Alsop, who visited Białoszewski in the spring of 1959:

Nothing quite like this apartment exists anywhere else in the world. Every single piece of furniture has been gravely maimed or wounded at some time in the past. Abstract paintings, strange and menacing constructions of wire and masking tape, great numbers of fragments of Polish baroque church-sculpture, two damaged but still magical Polish-Byzantine ikons, the remnants of a beautifully tender late Gothic altar piece — all these and many other objects are hung or strewn about.[3]

This museum of crippled objects Alsop describes has its literary counterpart in Białoszewski's reconstruction of the Warsaw Uprising, with its careful attention to the artifacts of life under siege. Similarly, Białoszewski's rejection of literary tradition in his poetry and his refusal to limit himself to conventional and so-called "tasteful" subject matter also finds its expression in his unorthodox treatment of this singular event in contemporary Polish history. Paradoxically, this poet of banality has chosen to address himself to a historical event of great moment, although he has done so in order to assert the primacy of the ordinary demands of life even in a situation of extraordinary horror.

The Warsaw Uprising broke out on August 1, 1944, as the war in Europe was drawing to a close. During the summer of 1944, while the Western Allies pushed eastward into France, the Soviet Red Army crossed the pre-1939 Soviet-Polish border into the territory that the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939, had awarded to the USSR. In July 1944, in the eastern Polish city of Lublin, the Soviets set up a provisional communist government for Poland. It was designed to contest the authority of the London-based

anticommunist government-in-exile, which disputed Stalin's claims to Poland's eastern territories. By the end of July 1944, Red Army detachments had reached the right bank of the Vistula and were encamped in the working-class suburb of Praga, directly across the river from Warsaw.

At this juncture, the underground Home Army, encouraged and directed by the London government-in-exile and assisted by other partisan groups, including units of the communist People's Army acting against orders, initiated the uprising in the capital. The anti-Soviet leadership hoped that by liberating Warsaw they could seize the initiative in the coming struggle for power with Moscow's puppet provisional government. Moreover, for many of the participants the uprising was to be a demonstration of Polish pride and vigor. Poles would not stand by passively to be "liberated" from the German yoke by the detested Russians. And, of importance for injured Polish pride, the April 1943 uprising by Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto would not remain the only organized armed rebellion against the Nazi subjugation of Poland.

The uprising did not succeed, however. The German forces in the city were neither as reduced in size nor as weakened as had been thought and, most important, the Soviet forces refrained from coming to the aid of the embattled capital until the uprising was on the verge of defeat. The people of Warsaw were left to fight and die by themselves. By the end of the uprising in early October, approximately 200,000 Poles — armed fighters and civilians — had been killed in combat and as victims of indiscriminate ground-level and aerial bombardment. After the city's surrender on October 3, 1944, and the negotiated evacuation of its surviving population, the Germans, following Hitler's explicit orders, completed the physical destruction of the city. When it was all over, Warsaw had been virtually obliterated. The clearing of the rubble and slow reconstruction of the city took many years and even in the late 1960s, when Białoszewski began composing his memoir, there were many areas in Warsaw which still bore the scars of devastation from both the 1944 uprising and the 1943 uprising in the ghetto.

Białoszewski was one of the noncombatant survivors. In his memoir he speaks of the uprising as "the greatest experience of my life." Perhaps because of the centrality of this experience, he waited almost a quarter of a century before attempting to shape his memories into some kind of literary form. As he tells us in the memoir, it was precisely the question of *form* over which he hesitated:

For twenty years I could not write about this. Although I wanted to very much. I talked. About the uprising. To so many people. All sorts of people. So many times. And all along I was thinking that I

must describe the uprising, somehow or other *describe* it. And I didn't even know that those twenty years of talking — I have been talking about it for twenty years — because it is the greatest experience of my life, a closed experience — precisely this talking is the only device suited to describing the uprising.

The form Białoszewski finally selected as least likely to distort the truth of his experience is a rambling monologue that wanders from incident to incident, with frequent digressions from a basically chronological structure. He rejects the diary form, which preserves the order of events as they occurred and presents the diarist's assessment without benefit of hindsight; he also rejects the retrospective narrative of memoirs in which events have been recollected, reinterpreted, and then marshaled prior to writing to form a coherent progression. Instead, he adopts the pose of a raconteur and preserves, by a variety of structural and linguistic devices, the illusion of a spoken, off-the-cuff narration.

One of the most important narrative devices is the yielding to free association in utter disregard of the chronological havoc wreaked by this approach. The reader will confront this stylistic device from the very first pages of the memoir. Białoszewski moves freely among a multiplicity of time levels in his narrative. These include the present time of writing; the past of the uprising, which is re-created as though it were the present; the elapsed time between these levels seen variously as past or present, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed; and what we may call the "historical past" of the years before the uprising.

Although a breathless outpouring of recollections is the basic narrative style of the memoir, it is by no means the only voice in which Białoszewski speaks. He frequently agonizes over the accuracy of his memories, but on occasion he speaks with the authority of a reporter as, for example, when he describes the postwar exhumations of the hastily buried dead at which he was present as a journalist. Occasionally he yields to an emotional outburst, but even the deepest of emotions is expressed in a muted tone. This emotional understatement is effective because the horror he describes is so overwhelming that any attempts at a sophisticated rhetoric would be both ludicrous and offensive in contrast. In fact, one temptation for a writer fearful of not doing justice to experiences so horrific that we refer to them as "unspeakable" is to resort to the eloquence of silence.

Białoszewski eventually chose to speak, and to commit his speech to paper, strengthening the illusion of an unpolished spoken narrative by using colloquial language and ignoring the rules of grammar in favor of the intonations of the spoken idiom. Indeed, after the 1970 publication of this memoir, he continued in successive editions of the

book and in recorded readings to introduce even more "ungrammatical" elements. This makes it very difficult to render the full flavor of the memoir in English translation. Since Polish syntax is more flexible than ours, I have been forced at times to opt for a more "normal" English syntax than is called for by Białoszewski's usage rather than run the risk of making the text appear utterly bizarre, which it certainly is not in the original.

Although Białoszewski preserves throughout his memoir the appearance of a spoken narrative whose development is determined primarily by the vagaries of free association and memories, the whole is actually carefully calculated to present a thorough picture of what the author calls the "topography" of the action. The text is densely aural and visual. We *see* Warsaw in the process of disintegration — not just the quick change from wholeness to ruins as the result of a direct hit but the multiple stages of metamorphosis of particular lovingly described churches and other buildings of the Old City (referred to in the text by its Polish names — the formal "Stare Miasto" and the affectionate "Starówka") as their contours and façades are slowly eaten away. We *hear* the unusual sounds of the city. Białoszewski uses onomatopoeic devices to mimic the varied noises of the artillery, the guns, the mine throwers. We also hear, in one of the most majestic scenes in the memoir, a hymn that is being sung by thousands in a labyrinthine bomb shelter. Hymns, psalms, litanies, snatches of popular songs and sayings are all introduced by Białoszewski and blended into his memoir along with information he has gathered from newspapers, from his friends, his father, and other sources. Precisely because Białoszewski defines the function of memoirist as that of witness, he is not content to rely on his own observations alone, though he is too distrustful to accept unquestioningly other versions of the event.

Białoszewski does not, however, see himself as a witness-participant of a great event such as the historians have defined it but rather of the greater event of human suffering and brute survival against all odds. For the most part, the people portrayed in the memoir are little people, the objects, not the subjects, of history — heroic only insofar as survival against all odds is an act of heroism. The narrative point of view adopted in the memoir is designed to avoid the distortions that literary conventions might impose. The narrator of this memoir, Białoszewski's "I," is a naive observer-victim who, even at the time of remembering and writing, does not claim to comprehend the events he lived through. He does not actually reject such abstract concepts as "heroism," "military strategy," "international posture"; rather, they are simply outside his normal categories of thought. Białoszewski presents himself as quite ordinary, a nonhero

who occasionally has a “heroic” impulse and even less frequently feels an impulse towards evil. An ordinary citizen, he had been trapped by history in a moment of great drama and terror.

Białoszewski eschews the historian’s attempt to create a pattern out of, or impose a meaning on, the random incidents that are for him the only reality of the uprising. His memoir boldly asserts the importance of the trivial in the record of a great historical occurrence. Through his eyes we see the uprising as a series of sometimes humorous but more often exceedingly painful vignettes as the besieged population of Warsaw attempts to cope with the basic human needs of finding shelter, food, and water in a city that is being consumed by explosions and flames before their very eyes. Białoszewski tells the story of the uprising as he saw it, literally from underground Warsaw — from the shelters and cellars and sewers in which he and his small circle of companions hid as the city collapsed and burned above their heads. His is a civilian victim’s view of a military and political debacle:

So, what was it all?

A pile of ruins? Of bombed-out cellars? And a pile of corpses?

I’m playing the sage unnecessarily. Long ago others created history out of this, made deductions from it and proclaimed them. And the thing is known. Yes, I’m speaking for myself — a layman. And for others. Also laymen. To the extent that we can speak because we were there. Laymen and non-laymen. All condemned together to a single history.

Białoszewski proceeds from the Stendhalian/Tolstoyan assumption that no participant can have an overview of a military operation and limits his reconstruction of the Warsaw Uprising to events he or a few trusted individuals actually observed. But the Tolstoyan rejection of the overview in favor of the distancing achieved through individual observation presumes the integrity of the individual observer. Białoszewski undermines even this premise by questioning the validity of his own perceptions and recollections. Memory is not a simple process, and he is careful to insist repeatedly on the shakiness of his recollections. Indeed, he is obsessed with the problems of remembering: the difficulty of fixing an event in time; the inevitable fusing of distinct memories into a single image; or, conversely, the fragmenting of a single incident into several disjointed images; the near impossibility of freeing one’s personal recollections from accepted interpretations and the numerous literary and cinematic depictions of a celebrated event. Time and again the narrative stops as Białoszewski suddenly hesitates over a particular detail.

The obvious effect of this concern with the accuracy of memory

— the yielding to flashbacks, the overlaying of memories from different moments — is to increase the warping of the book's chronological skeleton, which is also distorted by the related principle of free association. The reader is constantly being thrown off balance; the irritability Białoszewski's method induces in the reader is a calculated device for conveying the terror that prevailed throughout the uprising.

Several Polish critics have commented on the prominence in the memoir of the verb *latać* and its derivative forms. *Latać*, literally "to fly," but meaning in colloquial speech "to run," "to rush," or "to scurry," appears with various directional prefixes and sometimes in nominal forms approximately 250 times in this nonliteral meaning alone. This astonishingly high frequency of occurrence is the verbal expression of the chaos in Warsaw, where people were in a constant state of running as fast as they could from barricade to barricade, from one seeming shelter to another. A translator who has to find English equivalents for it is also struck by the equally high frequency of the word *chyba*, an elastic term whose function is to cast doubt on the accuracy of the statement in which it occurs. (Unlike *latać*, every occurrence of which has been rendered here almost without exception as some form of the verb "to run," *chyba*, because of its more fluid meaning, is translated variously as "perhaps," "it seems," "most likely," "I think.") Not counting its appearances in recorded dialogue, *chyba*, too, occurs in the memoir about 250 times. If we add in other words and phrases of hesitancy such as *może* (perhaps), *nie jestem pewien* (I'm not sure), *nie wiem* (I don't know), *nie pamiętam* (I don't remember), *zdaje mi się* (it seems to me), the number of times that terms expressing uncertainty appear soars to well over 400. Clearly, the question of *how* one remembers, the reliability of one's own observations and memories, is a second and equally important subject of this memoir.

These two colloquial words, *latać* and *chyba*, stand as symbols of Białoszewski's revisionism. *Latanie*, the racing about of civilians and partisans alike in response to the natural instinct to flee in the face of overwhelming danger, is a far cry from the pictures of dignified purposefulness and heroic martyrdom the more pious studies of the Warsaw Uprising have presented as a matter of course. Białoszewski's pervasive skepticism about the previously assumed "truths" of the uprising and about the possibility of ever getting at any truths through a narrative memoir is similarly embodied in the word *chyba*. It is, paradoxically, this thoroughgoing rejection of historical and literary assumptions that transforms Białoszewski's rough-hewn narrative into an astonishingly moving tribute to the city of Warsaw and the endurance of its civilian population.

This memoir, which insists on the importance of every remembered detail, however trivial, may at times appear tedious, as some contemporary critics complained. But the cumulative effect of Białoszewski's preoccupation with the minutiae of life under extreme wartime conditions is extremely moving. The lingering descriptions of architectural monuments in the process of disintegration unite to form a prose poem in memory of a beloved city. *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* is a work redeemed for literature by its very roughness.

This is not an inspirational book. It offers no comforting conclusions about individual heroism or historical necessity. There are no lessons to be drawn from the tragedy of Warsaw, no higher meaning to redeem the city's suffering. We are left with the simple fact that human beings are infinitely vulnerable and are offered no suggestion that this can ever be otherwise.

As the translator of *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, I have been granted the extraordinary opportunity to revise my original, forty-year-old translation for publication by New York Review Books. In the process, I have discovered and corrected some egregious errors that I would like to think were the inevitable and forgivable mistakes of a novice translator, and I hope that in making numerous minor changes throughout the text I have not introduced a new set of errors. Most importantly, this revised translation of *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* is based on the 2014 edition of *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego*, edited for the multivolume collection of Białoszewski's oeuvre by Dr. Adam Poprawa, who has produced for Polish readers a version of the memoir that restores passages that appear to have been omitted from the 1970 and later editions either because of rulings by the censors or by Białoszewski himself in anticipation of the censors' objections. Some of the changes introduced by Białoszewski in print in later editions or orally in his readings were stylistic; some were corrections of the abbreviated names by which he referred to certain individuals; a few filled out some of his memories. But the most interesting thread connecting a number of newly introduced comments and asides is political and linked to the fraught topic of the position of Jews in Poland during and immediately after the Holocaust. One may imagine that this became of heightened significance for Białoszewski after the 1967–68 official exclusion of Jews from positions of cultural and political influence, resulting in an exodus of many thousands of the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust who had hoped to live out their lives in Poland. As Poprawa points out in his afterword to the 2014 edition, during the 1970s Białoszewski recorded on tape for Polish radio the entire text of the memoir. In his reading he made a significant change in the memoir's concluding passage. A single inserted sentence quietly reminds the

reader of Poland's "Jewish question": "A couple of months later I saw Stefa, who was preparing to go abroad." Stefa, a Jewish woman and family friend who survived by passing herself off as Volksdeutscher, has returned to Warsaw but is preparing to leave Poland. Poprawa chose, on aesthetic grounds, to retain the closing passage as it appeared in the 1970 edition minus the "offending" sentence. But he admits that there is no way of knowing whether Białoszewski added the sentence in the 1970s or the censors removed it in 1970 as too clear a reminder of the 1968 purge of Jews. Because of its potential importance, I have chosen to include the variant ending in this introductory note, while respecting Poprawa's decision in the translation, which follows the 2014 edition in every particular.

The first person from the uprising whom I saw suddenly one evening near a kiosk in Częstochowa was Swen's mother, and the second was Swen, who was holding her by her arm. A couple of months later I saw Stefa, who was preparing to go abroad.

I saw what remained of Warsaw in February 1945.

— MADELINE G. LEVINE

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A GUIDE TO THE PRONUNCIATION OF POLISH NAMES

As a rule, Polish names are stressed on the penultimate syllable. Polish letters with approximate English equivalents:

c	ts
cz	ch
j	y
ł	w
rz	zh
sz	sh
w	v
a	ah
ą	nasalized o
e	eh
ę	nasalized e
i	ee

o
oh

ó, u
oo (as in soon)

y
i (as in if)

A MEMOIR OF THE WARSAW UPRISING

TUESDAY, August 1, 1944, was overcast, wet, not too warm. It must have been about noon when I stepped out onto Chłodna Street (my street at the time, number 40), and I remember that there were a lot of trams, cars, and people, and that right after I reached the corner of Żelazna Street I became aware of the date — August 1— and I thought to myself, more or less in these words: "August 1—it's Sunflower Day."

I remember looking down Chłodna Street in the direction of Kercelak. But why the association with sunflowers? Because that's when they're blooming and even shedding their petals, because they're ripening… And also because at that time I was more naive and sentimental, I hadn't become cunning yet, because the times themselves were also naive, primitive, rather carefree, romantic, conspiratorial, wartime… So — that yellow color must have been in something — the light of the inclement weather with sunlight struggling to break through (it did) on the trams painted red as they are in Warsaw.

I shall be frank recollecting my distant self in small facts, perhaps excessively precise, but there will be only the truth. I am forty-five years old now, twenty-three years have gone by, I am lying here on my couch safe and sound, free, in good health and spirits, it is October, night, 1967, Warsaw once again has 1,300,000 inhabitants. I was seventeen years old when I went to bed one day and for the first time in my life heard artillery fire. It was the front. And that was probably September 2, 1939. I was right to be terrified. Five years later the all too familiar Germans were still walking along the streets in their uniforms.

(I am using the designation "Germans" here and elsewhere because any other usage will sound artificial. Just as at that time the Vlasovites were often assumed to be Ukrainians.[1] We knew that the Germans weren't the only Hitlerites. We even saw it. I remember the Latvians in 1942 after the liquidation of the little ghetto. With rifles. Entirely in black. They were standing along the length of Sienna Street. Close together. On the Aryan sidewalk. And for entire days and nights they scanned the windows on the Jewish side of Sienna. The remains of windowpanes in their frames, plugged up with quilts. Deathly goose down. Along the street — that one street — from Żelazna to Sosnowa ran not a wall but barbed wire. Along its entire length. The roadway, the cobblestones — on that side tall reeds and

goosefoot were already growing — had dried out by then and turned as gray as charcoal. And yet they were crouching. That's how they took aim. And I remember that one of them fired every so often. At those windows.)

Well, that August 1, at about two in the afternoon, Mama said that I should go get some bread from Teik's cousin on Staszic Street; apparently, there wasn't enough bread and they had arranged something. I went. And I remember that when I returned there were a great many people and there was already a commotion. And people were saying, "They killed two Germans on Ogrodowa Street."

It seems to me that I didn't go the way I should have because right away they were rounding up people, but somehow it also seems that I really did take Ogrodowa Street. My commotion in Wola may have been only local because right afterward I ran into Staszek P., the composer, and afterward Staszek laughed and said, "And my mother said that today was such a peaceful day!"

Staszek himself had seen many tigers. "Tanks as big as apartment houses."

So they were cruising around. Someone had seen a thousand people (ours) on horseback, riding up to 11 Mazowiecka Street. Various things were happening. And it wasn't even five o'clock, or "W" hour, yet. Staszek and I were supposed to go to 24 Chłodna Street to see Irena P., my colleague at the secret university. (Our Polonistics department was located on the corner of Świętokrzyska Street and Jasna, on the third floor; we sat on school benches; it was referred to as Tynelski's school of commercial studies.) Well, we were supposed to be at her place by five (I had a date at seven with Halina, who was living with Zocha and my father at 32 Chmielna Street), but since it was early we walked along Chłodna from Żelazna to Waliców and back. The sexton had spread a carpet on the church steps and set out potted green trees for a formal wedding. Suddenly we see that the sexton is removing everything, rolling up the carpet, carrying in the potted trees, rushing to get it done, and this surprised us. In fact, the day before — July 31, that is — Roman Ż. had dropped in to say goodbye to us. At that moment the Soviet front could be heard distinctly, explosions and simultaneously the planes dropping their bombs on the German districts. So we went into Irena's. It was before five. We're talking, suddenly there's shooting. Then, it seems, heavier weapons. We can hear cannons. And all sorts of weapons. Finally a shout, "Hurrahhh…"

"The uprising," we told each other immediately, like everyone else in Warsaw.

Strange. Because no one had ever used that word before in his life. Only in history, in books. It was boring. But now, all of a

sudden… it's here, and the sort with "hurrahhhs" and the thundering of the crowd. Those "hurrahhhs" and the thundering were the storming of the courthouses on Ogrodowa. It was raining. We observed whatever could be seen. Irena's window looked out onto a second courtyard with a low red wall at the end, and beyond this wall was another courtyard, which extended all the way to Ogrodowa Street and housed a sawmill, a shed, a pile of boards, and handcarts. We're standing there watching and then someone in a German tankist's uniform, I think, wearing a forage cap and an armband, leaps across that low red wall from the other courtyard into ours. He jumps down onto the lid of our garbage bin. From the bin onto a stool. From the stool onto the asphalt.

"The first partisan!" we shouted.

"You know what, Mironek, I could give myself to him," Irena told me ecstatically through the curtain.

Immediately afterward people ran into that courtyard from Ogrodowa Street and began grabbing the wagons and carts to use as barricades.

Then — I remember — after Staszek cooked dumplings and we ate them, we played a game, thumbed through Rabelais's *Gargantua* (my first contact with him). Then we went to sleep. Of course, it wasn't quiet. The whole time. Only the large-caliber guns, which became so familiar later on, quieted down a little. So Irena went to sleep in her room. And Staszek and I lay down on her mother's bed in her mother's room, since of course she had not come home from the center. It was raining. Drizzling. It was cold. We could hear machine guns, that rat-a-tat-tat. Nearer burst, then farther off. And rocket flares. Every so often. In the sky. We fell asleep to their noise, I think.

It was 1935 when, for the first time in my life, I heard about bombardments. When the Italian fascists attacked Abyssinia. Lame Mania was visiting us, listening to the radio through earphones, and suddenly she announced, "They're bombing Addis Ababa."

I had a vision of Aunt Natka's house on Wronia (I don't know why that one precisely), the sixth floor, and that we're there on the landing between the fifth and sixth floors. And that we start caving in along with those floors. Then right away I thought that was probably impossible. But in that case, what was it really like?…

What happened on the second day of August 1944? Since June the Allied offensive in the west had been moving across France, Belgium, Holland. And from Italy. The Russian front was at the Vistula. Warsaw entered the second day of the uprising. Explosions woke us. It was raining.

Organizing began. Block leaders. Duty tours. Shoring up cellars. Tunneling underground passageways. For nights on end. Barricades.

At first people thought they could be made out of anything, such as the boards from the sawmill and the carts on Ogrodowa Street. (All of Ogrodowa — we looked out on it — was decked out in Polish flags — a strange holiday!) Meetings and conferences in the courtyards. Assignments: who, what. Possibly already a newssheet. Of the uprising. And in general the partisans. Showed up. In German castoffs — in whatever they could find: a helmet, boots, with anything at all in their hands, so long as it could shoot. We looked out onto Chłodna Street. And it was true: a front had been established. Throughout Warsaw. Right away. Or rather, several fronts. Which the first night established. And the day began to force back. This was reported in the newssheets. There were explosions. All sorts. From cannons. Bombs. Machine guns. Was it the front? The real one, the German-Russian front? It was moving from somewhere near Modlin toward Warsaw (our great hope). Nothing dreadful yet from Wola. But Chłodna Street was in trouble. It seemed to be ours. Already decked in flags, I think. But on the corner of Waliców and Chłodna there was a Wache — a guard post. There was a second Wache (the building with the columns) on the corner of Żelazna and Chłodna. “Wache” meant a building held by the Germans, and that meant shooting from above (from all six stories). Machine guns. Grenades. Every so often a single shot from the roof, from behind a chimney, someone wounded, someone killed. It was those concealed men who were shooting.

“Pigeon fanciers,” people called them. They were chased, hunted down, but nothing came of it. They fired from our buildings. Later they were being caught. But there were a lot of them. All the time. To the very end. It seems they would walk behind the tanks as they rode by and jump through the gates. Shells hurtled in from the German districts, from Wola, from the freight station or the tracks, from an armored train, from the Saxon Gardens. Planes flew overhead and dropped bombs. Every now and then. Frequently. Sometimes every half hour. Even more frequently. And tanks. From Hale Mirowskie. From Wola, too. They wanted to conquer, or rather, to clear the line. Chłodna Street. The first barricades, temporary, wooden, weren’t worth anything. The tanks rode right over them. Shells set them on fire in an instant. Or incendiary bombs. I remember people throwing down tables, chairs, wardrobes onto the street from the third floor of the house on the other corner of Chłodna and Żelazna opposite the Wache, and people here grabbing them for the barricades. And right away those tanks rode over them.

So people started tearing up the concrete slabs from the sidewalks, the cobblestones from the streets. There were tools for this. The tram drivers had prepared iron crowbars and pickaxes for the uprising. They handed them out to the people. And with these the

cobblestones were broken into pieces, the concrete slabs were dug up, the hard ground was broken. But those two Waches interfered a lot. I know that my mother suddenly showed up at number 24, in Irena's courtyard. Worried about me. She'd run over from beyond Żelazna Street, from 4 °Chłodna. She brought something to eat. I preferred to stay here at Irena's with Staszek. I walked Mother to the corner. The one near the Wache. We separated for the time being, going in opposite directions. Everything stealthily — at a run — under cover of the barricades. At the intersection the tram wires were torn and tangled somehow from the crossfire — anyway, someone had hung a portrait of Hitler on them and this infuriated the Germans. They were shooting at that intersection. The "pigeon fanciers" were puffing away.

I can't distinguish exactly what happened on the second and what happened on the third of August (on Wednesday and Thursday). Both days were cloudy and drizzly. There were already fires, bombs. Both days there was racing downstairs.

"To the shelter!"—or, rather, to ordinary cellars. To the yard for discussions, duty tours, to work at digging, building barricades. We were still living upstairs, on the fourth floor. But we were already sitting in the foyer, at the most in the kitchen, within the innermost walls, because shells were pouring in. We slept on couches placed in the foyer. Once, Irena P. and I ran down without our shoes on, I think, because there was already an air raid and bombs. Staszek was in the WC at that moment. Then the bombs fell. Somehow, nothing hit us. A few minutes later Staszek came down and said, "You know, while I was sitting on the toilet the entire floor and the whole toilet with me on it caved in… And how…"

Anyway, we didn't go out into Chłodna Street right away. Which was good. The gate, like all the others, was barricaded. We decided to hang out a flag. They blew it up through the iron grating.

"Attention!" and "*Poland has not perished yet.*"

The Germans began firing. At the flag. At the gate. Someone got something in his finger. Probably the lieutenant who hung out the flag. Or maybe the commandant of the Antiaircraft Defense for this house? I don't remember. At some point there was a sudden dreadful blast. So that everything jumped. We flew downstairs.

"The Germans blew themselves up along with their Wache on the corner of Waliców!" people were shouting.

"Five apartment houses are gone!"

We ran out into Chłodna Street. The street was covered with clouds. Rust colored and dark brown. From bricks, from smoke. When it settled we saw a terrifying transformation. A reddish-gray dust was covering everything. Trees. Leaves. A centimeter thick, I think. And

that devastation. One Wache less. But at what a cost. Anyway, things were already beginning to change. To anxiety. And always for the worse. Visually too. From Żelazna Brama Square, from Bank Square, from Elektoralna Street along our side of Chłodna against the wall, people were running and running— women, children, all hunched over, gray, covered with some kind of powder. I remember that the sun was setting. Fires were burning. The people ran on and on. A flood of people. From the bombed-out houses. They were fleeing to Wola.

The next day, around sunset, Staszek and I were ordered to carry concrete paving stones. To the other side of the street. Staszek grabbed a slab and carried it across. I was amazed. Suddenly, we hear shells. One hits a wooden fire barricade behind the church on Chłodna. It bursts into flames. Right afterward something hits Hale Mirowskie. It catches fire. Burns with a vivid flame. Tomato colored. The sun is setting. The weather is fair for the first time. On our side of Chłodna people are running beneath the wall to Elektoralna and beyond. Just like yesterday. The same people. They are fleeing from Wola.

“The Ukrainians are on the march from Wola and butchering people. And burning them on pyres!”

The fifth day, Saturday, August 5. A lot of prolonged roaring. I run out to the gate.

“The Wache is taken!” I race upstairs. With that joyous news. To Irena and Staszek. Chłodna was free. A minute later all decked in flags. In a moment crowds poured into the street. To make barricades. Everyone. Women. Old men. I remember. Salesladies in white aprons. And an older woman who was quickly passing me bricks with one hand because she was holding her pocketbook in the other. I passed the bricks to a salesgirl in her white apron. And so on.

People were shouting, “Faster! Faster!” The bricks were collected from the blown-up buildings on the corner of Waliców. Suddenly, we hear airplanes. We run to the steps of a Secession-style apartment house at number 20 or 22.[2] Bombs. We run down to the cellar. It was the house of Pan Henneberg, I think, an engineer, one of the Henneberg brothers and the father of my three schoolmates and scouting friends. I used to visit there before the war. I remember that whenever I visited them in those days the house was full of people, the door to the balcony was open and there was a terrific noise from the street, as if people were actually riding through the apartment. This morning or the day before, Pan Henneberg had climbed the tram mast and cut the wires and then thrown them down so that the tanks would get all tangled up in them, and he’d cursed at the Germans, out loud. Not long ago, just this year in fact, I read in the weekly *The*

Capital that one of the younger Henneberg brothers, one of my schoolmates, that is, had died in the uprising. The other one also perished. I remember their mother from my school days, when she was in mourning; she had very blond hair. We could hear the tanks. They were on the way already. All or nothing. We had to escape.

In the cellar in this building there was one elderly gentleman. He had come there.

"Where did you come from?" I asked him.

"From Krakowskie Przedmieście."

He described how the Germans were arresting people and herding them in front of the tanks against the partisans, so that the partisans would shoot them.

"And the whole street has been burned down…"

"Which street?" I asked.

"Krakowskie Przedmieście, of course," he said very sadly.

I remember that I was surprised then, first of all at hearing someone call Krakowskie Przedmieście a street rather than an avenue and second that the old man was so terribly upset about it. I am not surprised now.

After the bombardment we went outside. They were calling for help at the next barricade right before Żelazna Street. Men were needed. I ran over. They handed out picks and crowbars. For the cobblestones and sidewalks. Anyway, part of the trench was already dug up. I saw for the first time what a tangle of pipes and conduits there is underground. They warned us to dig carefully. On the fourth corner of Żelazna a cigarette kiosk was overturned as a barrier, the cigarettes spilling out. Some guy started picking them up.

"Hey, mister, at such a time!" And other people also began yelling at him. He was embarrassed, stopped, went on digging with us. Suddenly people are wheeling out the corpses of those Germans from the Wache. In wheelbarrows. Stripped to the waist. Barefoot. The green soles of their boots sticking out. Bare soles. And I remember the belly of one or was it two Germans protruding from the wheelbarrows. There were several of them in each wheelbarrow. They are to be buried. On the square in front of the Church of St. Boromeusz. Don't make a cross. But start over and mark out a circle of dirt (which later, more or less at dusk, I saw they did). They take me to help out.

I am ashamed to refuse. But I wish for an air raid right at that moment, so that others will have to do it instead of me. And there is one. Quickly, ever so quickly. They fly over. And bombs! So that the men with the wheelbarrows drop the wheelbarrows, the German corpses sail into the trenches, into the excavations, strike the pipes, the cables, and remain somewhere deep down there. With the result that some people dug them out immediately, but by then it was other

people. After the bombs. I fled for all I was worth two apartment houses away.

Then the return to Irena. We decided to separate. Because we really had to go back to our mothers. Irena remained here, in her own house. I was supposed to go back to my house, to 4 ˚Chłodna. Staszek to his. To 17 Sienna Street. But people were running from that direction and screaming, “Pańska’s bombed! Prosta’s bombed!”

We say goodbye between Waliców and Żelazna. I run toward Żelazna. A lot of people, objects, destruction, changes, commotion. A crowd. Flight. The pigeon fanciers. I remember. I see: a line of what looks like Boy Scouts in green uniforms making their way from Chłodna Street to Żelazna near the arcades in those various blind alleys. They’re holding bottles of gasoline. They turn into Żelazna. The weather’s fine. Saturday. Sunny. I rush into our house. Mama’s there. And besides Mama:

“Babu Stefa!” because she really was sitting there in an armchair. In the living room. Just like that. I called her Babu Stefa because I was reading Rabindranath Tagore then, in which Panu Babu is a character. Stefa, a Jew, was our boarder until the spring of 1944. Half family. Before that she’d lived with my father’s second wife (common law, Zocha), at 32 Chmielna Street, with Zocha, my father, and Halina. I don’t know if there were some other reasons or if they simply had quarreled, but one day in 1942, after we’d gotten hold of this apartment on Chłodna Street which had belonged to Jews, because up to that time the ghetto was here, the wall of the ghetto crossed Chłodna between Wronia and Towarowa Streets, they’d constricted the ghetto slightly, they were always constricting the ghetto, so that a number of apartments were vacant, and Father arranged to get this one, 4 ˚Chłodna, and it was not that these apartments were destroyed so much as that they had a certain peculiar appearance: in the middle of our kitchen there were dried-up feces, obviously human, and Stefa made herself at home right there in the kitchen, concealing herself behind a green half curtain as soon as someone came to see us, although she often showed herself later on because she knew several of our friends and relatives, trusted them, and anyway very little was known about her.

So I cry out, “Where did you come from?!” and we are delighted, we greet each other, shout in amazement, what a coincidence! Probably I was more excited than she. “Babu Stefa, is it possible… are you really here?”

“Oh!”

The armchair in which Stefa was sitting also belonged to a Jew, not from this building but from an apartment house that I think is standing to this day, either it was never damaged or it was rebuilt, in

a blind alley, literally blind, which led from Żelazna Street right into Chłodna on the left side, the side nearer the Vistula. They were holding an auction there. Of Jewish furniture. Father rushed into our house. He shouted at me to follow him. Swen happened to be there, so he rushed out to keep me company. Although I didn't want to go. There. But it was hard to say no because of Father. The gate of this apartment house where the Jewish auction was being held was filled with a heap of junk. Rubbish. A racket. Human. Father grabbed a number of chairs, each one from a different village so that each had its own weight and size, and off they all went to 4 °Chłodna Street. And so in 1942 first of all Father brought Stefa from 32 Chmielna straight to us, supposedly for one night, for two, and so she stayed on for two years. He made up documents for her in the name of Zosia Romanowska. Because Zosia Romanowska had gone to Grochów to see her sister and brother-in-law on September 8, 1939, and she'd taken along her sister-in-law Nora — only to have the door there slam closed on them so that they couldn't work their keys to get it open, and when the planes flew over, before anything could be done, they had already fallen through to the cellar and only one person survived, Hanka (up above and under the ruins), Zosia's other sister-in-law who was holding by the hand her neighbor's little daughter, already dead, and she herself was buried alive in the ruins, and when later she lived next to us on Leszno Street with Nanka (when we had already lost the apartment in Śródmieście), that is, when she was living in the room that had been Zosia's, she was afraid, I know, to cover herself to the neck with her quilt. Because as she lost her awareness of the quilt it became confused in her mind with rubble that was up to her neck. So Stefa had identity papers in Zosia's name; a little older than she, but in any case Stefa's hair was bleached, not really red but sort of a ginger color, resembling a Jewish woman more or less, so it was fortunate that the Germans weren't aware of these things and our thugs weren't either, and even more fortunate that Stefa had great courage and a saving self-assurance; when she saw Germans on the road — for she walked along various roads from Służewiec down to Wilanów or Augustówka with her so-called petty wares, very petty, safety pins, Czech jewelry, in order to have something to live on and a bit of money to spare — well, when she saw Germans she approached them herself and asked, "*Wie spät ist?"* and she always came back by tram on the "*Nur für Deutsche"* platform; once when she met me in the city and we were going to go home together, she said, "Why don't you ride with me; I'll teach you a lesson." And actually, not only did she get on at the "*Nur für Deutsche"* platform but she shoved her way to the front end of the car which was separated from the rest of the car and the crowd by a chain (it was empty here); I followed her, standing there

rather stupidly and she sat down and began arguing with a Volksdeutscher woman, who, she said, was crowding her.

So, Father brought over the chairs after he brought over Stefa. Two Jewish matters. Which went their separate ways for a short while. And then met again.

In 1943, I think, we held one of our so-called "soirées" in the building where the chairs had been auctioned, or perhaps in the one directly across from it, at any rate, in that appendix to Żelazna—Swen, Halina, Irena, Staszek, and I. In the apartment of whoever it was who lived there. A patriotic-literary soirée, with theatrical performances; Swen performed, he was playing Nick at the time, and I, having practically the rights of an extra according to him, played the king. Out of timidity, woodenness, I sat stiffly the whole time and spoke the same way. My colleague in the secret university, Wojtek, who also perished in the uprising, in Żoliborz, said that he'd really enjoyed it. I told him why I acted that way.

"It doesn't matter; it was very nice."

I remember that we performed an excerpt from Wyspiański's *The Wedding* there. Swen played Stańczyk, wearing the national flag, which he'd carelessly brought over either in his briefcase or in a little bundle.[3]

In his own way, Father had the most unusual business projects. Once, he dragged a whole bushel of potatoes from Kercelak to Leszno Street, to the fourth floor, at that. Rotten. Frozen. But even so they were priceless. Nanka, Father, Mama, and Sabina remembered from the last war that you could make potato pancakes from such frozen potatoes. They made them and they were good. Another time Father bought an icebox at an auction. Mama and Stefa kept wondering why. Because it was broken. And once, he arrived at Chłodna with a whole coatful of fish, very tiny ones. Just like that. In the skirt of his coat. They were slipping out all over the place. He told Mama that she should make croquettes from them. She did. There were so many of them! Enough to line all the windowsills. And we had four windows then. Once, on Christmas Eve of '42 or '43, the door opened and in walked Father carrying a Christmas tree — a skinny pine. Mama was astounded. So was I. Father acted as if it were perfectly natural. We ought to begin decorating it. I got started. It was strange hanging the decorations on those pine branches. In general, a pine isn't a tree, if you ask me. It was like decorating a pine in Otwock. It had nothing in common with a Christmas tree, or so it seemed to me then. An entirely different species. None of the fragrance. Nor the prickliness.

Among Father's many ideas was that of profiting from the dead, one example of which I've already given. But there were more. We received marmalade, bread, and various other foods on the basis of

ration cards in the names of about four deceased persons. Relatives, of course. But such things were done in those days. What wasn't done then?

It's time to explain the case of Stefa. Stefa would have lived with us until the end. But one day in the spring of 1944 I came back from the city and Mama (she sewed dresses for women so that she and I would have something to live on, or rather, she re-remade them, because these were clothes made from already remade clothing, so-called fripperies, and if a woman wanted to combine a coat with fur, she used rabbit fur; they knew it would shed like cats in springtime, but what could they do)… Anyway, Mama, who sewed for our custodian, too, told me at the door, "You can't imagine how deathly frightened I was today. The janitress shows up for that rag of hers and she says to me, 'That lady who's your boarder, well, when she walks across the yard she twists her head like this and walks sort of sideways; oy, you can tell from a mile away that she's a Jewess.' "

So Stefa had to move. As it turned out, the janitress hadn't made that remark from malice, but who could tell. We had to assume the cat was out of the bag, as they say. Anyway, one warm day, in May I think, after Stefa had moved out, I woke up at six a.m. and could hear a real commotion. Downstairs. Right away, I had a funny feeling. I rushed over to the window in my nightshirt. In front of every stairwell there was a German with a rifle. And they were going through all the stairwells and checking everyone. No one knew why. In our apartment, at least, it didn't go any further than a check of identity cards, my *Ausweis*, and then they left. A German and a Polish-speaking informer wearing a white coat. Maybe nothing would have happened. To Stefa. If she'd still been there. Perhaps she would have passed as Zosia Romanowska. But who knows who that guy in the white coat was.

Well, on August 5, 1944, Stefa was sitting there in that chair, the post-Jewish one, with which she had been reunited, a turban on her head, because turbans and wooden shoes were fashionable out of necessity throughout Europe, it seems, but for some reason you could recognize German women in particular by those turbans and Stefa, after all, was pretending to be German.

So, Stefa was sitting in that chair and saying, "Where haven't I been. I'm riding in a tram. A commotion. I look at my basket. And then someone throws me an armband. A Jewish one. They stop the tram, take us to Gęsiówka. We're there, the partisans rescue us, we run through Krasiński Gardens, across Bielańska Street, and then through the Saxon Gardens; but the Germans are there, so we double back; Żelazna Brama, people on their knees, they're going to shoot them, I'm telling you, Miron, it's a miracle we escaped."

“But you made it back here?”

“Ach, what it was like…”

Aunt Józia was there, too, right away. Her house—49 Ogrodowa Street — adjoined ours at 4 ˚Chłodna. Its third courtyard (the rear wall) had a hole in it and that was the passageway into our long courtyard. I was happy that there were more of us. Though, to be honest, Aunt Józia returned to her house. But Stefa stayed on; it wasn’t gloomy. And also, she’d survived. But suddenly, after various setbacks and news bulletins, such disastrous deterioration and such hell set in, that one lost interest in everything. The attack against Chłodna, against Ogrodowa, was in progress. People were shot to death, burned on pyres on Górczewska Street, on Bem, on Młynarska, on Wolska. Those who were stubbornly (I am amazed at how stubbornly) defending the lines of the Polish front kept finding the stairways, exits, everything cut off; they lay on roofs, on the fifth and sixth floors; the roofs caught fire, burned through, and the men caved in along with the roofs. An inferno, as in the ghetto during Easter of 1943.

Excavating, digging out, extinguishing fires, helping — it was difficult, although it was done, but it was made impossible by new bombs falling all the time, incendiaries. Or rather, it was hopeless. A vicious circle. At someone’s cry, “Planes!” we rush to a cellar, a shallow basement housing a workshop for glass tubes and balls. A crush. Panic. Prayer. Explosions. The rumbling, bursting of bombs. Groans and fear. Again they fly low. An explosion, they’re probably bombing the front, we crouch down. Nearby an old neighbor beats her breast, “Sacred heart of Jesus, have mercy on us…”

The howling of planes, bombs.

“Sacred heart…”

And suddenly something rocks our house. Window frames, doors, glass panes are blown out. Explosions. The end? Still more crashes. Even more explosions. We go outside for a while. The yard is changed, it’s black, covered with dust, gone gray, the windows are empty, the panes smashed to smithereens. In front of the gate is a crater half the length of the street. We look out from our second-floor window. At that scene. Crowds in the courtyard. Hell — nothing less — and without end. It’s bad. The crowds panic. With packages, bundles. They run. Some toward the gate. Others, away from the gate. Some through the hole toward Ogrodowa Street. Others toward us from Ogrodowa Street. Suddenly, an uproar. A horrifying scream. A kind of humming from the crowd. They’re carrying something. Someone… They put it down. Corpses? A scream… Whose?

“That’s Pani Górska. Her son was killed in the school on Leszno Street.”

They bring in the corpses. A whole school bombed. Number 100-something Leszno, 111 or 113. Where once I went to see a Christmas pageant. Long before the war, of course. During one of the acts the curtains in the left corner of the stage were torn. The wings were suddenly exposed. It was a catastrophe, because a crowd of angels, kings, and others were awaiting their turn there. With a squeal they rushed into a corner, huddled together, formed a triangle. The angels huddled together, pressed close to one another, covered their faces with their hands, and squealed. How painful it was for me now in this courtyard.

(Pani Górska, her son, and her daughter-in-law were patriots, Baptists. They came to Mother to sew for them. Both women. My mother asked them, "Would you give up your faith?" "I? Never. I was raised in this faith and I'll die in it.")

I decided to return to Irena's for a while, to 24 Chłodna. I found them all in the cellar already. Depressed. But it was quieter here and there were fewer people.

Two women were sitting opposite them. One was worrying about her children because she had left them at Wedel's in Praga.[4] The other, somewhat younger, was with her. They sat there, slumping. In that passageway. Which, in normal times, was intended to be used occasionally for fetching potatoes or coal.

"Like owls," Staszek said slowly and, characteristically, in an awfully audible whisper.

I remember the calm. And the relief. After my house. We passed the night here. Because I know that on the next day it was sunny, warm, the sixth of August. The owls (the older one was Heńka; the younger, what was her name? — I know she could tell fortunes from cards) said, "Today is the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Perhaps the good Lord will change something for the better."

And suddenly the news erupted: "The uprising has failed."

"My God," the cellar, stairs, women, crowds jumped up, "so much effort and all for nothing, Lord? It can't be possible."

"And yet…"

"My God." People wrung their hands, raced around the courtyards. After the first complaints there was discipline, solidarity. Because there was despair.

And suddenly people are running around shouting, with newssheets, with a retraction. That it isn't true.

The partisans themselves, I remember, spoke about defeat and initiated the despair; but now, what joy!

But Sunday had just begun. There was fear such as had not yet been experienced. It was then that we three decided to go our separate ways. Staszek would go to Sienna Street. Irena would remain

here. I would go home again. Sun, heat, smoke, fires, explosions; I raced home. It was probably that day that I found Aunt Józia. In the afternoon the Germans, with the Vlasovites pushing ahead of them, began launching the final attack on Kercelak, on Towarowa, on Okopowa. Kercelak fell. Our lines drew back. They were already close to the barricades on the corners of Wronia. And they were shooting. But on the Towarowa — Kercelak — Okopowa line more streets were still to fall, no longer in Wola but in the direction of Śródmieście. (Actually, those of us on Chłodna Street, right up to the Kercelak — Towarowa — Okopowa line, were really in Śródmieście, not just in the traditional administrative center but in the uprising's center, at least as it had been designated by the leadership when Warsaw was divided into districts before the outbreak of the uprising.) Meanwhile, the strip between Towarowa and Kercelak — Wronia was being defended. But the attack was proceeding not only along the streets, with infantry, tanks, artillery, machine guns, grenades, flame throwers, antitank guns, but also — which was much worse — from the sky. Protected by all of these, the planes flew over in endless formations, turned and came back, and bombed apartment house after apartment house, outbuilding after outbuilding. Chłodna. Ogrodowa. Krochmalna. Leszno. Grzybowska. Łucka. And so on. They collapsed and burned.

Suddenly a shout: "Let's dig out the buried."

I report. We wait by the gate. We're released.

"They're gone already. Others."

But right away there's another shout: "39 Chłodna is on fire! Who'll put it out?"

We race outside. It's right across the way. The whole building is burning. Four stories, probably. There's no water. No, there is water, but buckets have to be used in addition to the pump. Through the hole in the wall. There is also sand for firefighting. Women run over and help. Heat. Flames. These means of extinguishing fire are practically useless. The walls are already in flames. On the fourth floor smoke is coming from behind some of the doors. But they're locked. We hurl ourselves against them. No use. We break them down with axes. We dash in. A wall is on fire. A bare wall. We run over with those pails. For water. We go back. We pour it on. Whatever good that does. We run downstairs.

The women are yelling, "Use sand! Use the sand!"

We dash upstairs again. Now the planes come. They scatter bombs. And bomblets. Incendiary.

"Extinguish the bombs!"

We rush over. Pour sand on the bomblets. There are about twenty of them. Maybe thirty. In a pile. At the entrance. More on the fourth

floor. They're smoldering and hissing. And the wall is already on fire from them. Sand does a wonderful job. We hope. We pour it on. Will it help? After all, they're bursting one after another. It does help. But now the right and the left walls. Are aflame. Already. We race downstairs. Pass each other. It's good there are several of us. And those women. They give us the buckets filled with sand (I can't remember if we lost water all of a sudden). They pass them to us through a hole in the wall, so that we won't have to run across unnecessarily. They carry them over to the stairs. Then we grab them. Run inside. I remember that I chased those bomblets. That I stamped on them. Because there was no alternative. They were extinguished on the run. While they were smoldering. The whole pile. Better yet: the flames on the walls were becoming fewer and fewer. Unbelievable. After someone sprinkled sand the fire curled up and disappeared. A miracle! We've put it out! In this hell! The action is over. We go back.

The assault is increasing. The bombardment is becoming heavier by the minute. Those who are rescued, more or less conscious, uninjured, rush into our cellars. Terrible panic. In the courtyard, too. We ourselves are panicky. We move to Aunt Józia's. Through the hole. To 49 Ogrodowa Street. There are some women in the yard near the stoves, in the smoke, and some guys are out there fighting with axes. They chase each other. Hurl the axes. The axes sail through the air. I am not exaggerating. We go to my aunt's apartment on the fifth floor. But we can't remain there longer than two minutes. With Aunt Józia's boarder (an old lady) and her brother (also gray haired) we rush downstairs to someone's apartment on a lower floor with some of their belongings and ours. Into someone's kitchen. We sit down. Aunt Józia's boarder gives something to her gray haired brother: "Here, have some bread with sugar." He takes it, eats.

"Would you like some more bread and sugar?"

He nods his head.

I couldn't eat anything for two days.

Suddenly, such explosions, crashes, that we run downstairs.

The arrival of the bombed. Everything is gray. From the ruins. Covered with smoke. Aunt Józia, Stefa, Mama observe that the cellar is weak, the building made of boards, plaster-covered laths, and bricks. But the neighboring cellar — number 51—Klein vaulting, a new building, not yet covered with stucco. We quickly move there through holes, the underground passageways. There are crowds there. They are sitting on the concrete floor. It's damp. In the corners are carbide lamps. Mama, Aunt Józia, and Stefa take out some bedding, spread it out on a free bit of floor. In that crowd. Chaos. Explosions, shells, bombs… unbearable. But the worst is that the Ukrainians are coming. And butchering. Everyone. People talk about it nonstop.

People. Twenty years later — right now, in 1964 and 1965—exact figures have been offered by witnesses on both sides. Our newspapers have printed estimates of how many people were massacred in Wola just on Saturday and Sunday, August 5 and 6. Several tens of thousands. Some who were not shot to death were burned along with those who were supposed dead. They were thrown onto common pyres. From St. Stanisław Hospital on the corner of Wolska and Młynarska Streets (now the Hospital for Infectious Diseases No. 1) patients were shot to death or thrown out of the windows alive into the courtyard below. They set fire to everything as they passed. Living or not. People were buried on the spot. Just like that. In 1946 I was sent to the exhumations as a reporter. I went there with a news photographer. We entered that courtyard. Three or four rows of freshly exhumed, shapeless clumps covered with earth. I had various associations. With cutlets in rolls covered with some sauce. I definitely remember one "cutlet" with a single bone sticking out. The rest a filthy mess.

Suddenly a woman orderly rushed into our shelter. "Who will help carry a wounded man?"

And suddenly, after the uproar and despite the explosions, there was silence.

"Will no one help?"

There were several hundred women there. And probably as many men. Everyone froze.

"No one at all?"

"I'll go." I stood up.

No one moved. I jumped up after the orderly. Up the stairs. And out into the street. Ogrodowa.

"Over here! Over here!" I snatched up the front end of a stretcher. And onward — fast. We joined a procession of stretchers. In front of us. Behind us. Toward Żelazna Street and farther on — in the direction of the courthouse, because that's where the hospital for the uprising was located. The whole winding procession moved on toward the courthouse, toward the center of the city. It was Sunday afternoon, four or five o'clock, there was heat, rising smoke mixed with dust, either there was a fire nearby or something was just smoldering, explosions, cobblestones underfoot (we walked rapidly, now looking down at our feet, now forward again, now backward, now at the houses and the sky), scurrying, tall apartment houses, now and then barricades across the road, cornices. Also, I want to add, pigeons. But it seems either there weren't any pigeons by then or they were kept so that they wouldn't fly about; or perhaps they really were there and did fly up and wheel around and it was only the cornices and the window frames which had produced that smoke and dust. But the reason I

don't trust my memory about the pigeons (undoubtedly, I didn't know then either what was what), because at other times and in other places I seemed to see the same thing, and right after the war, when I was living on Poznańska Street and it was Easter night with an early-morning Mass of the Resurrection, those pigeons — this time real ones — took flight and whirred among the cornices after every loud sound. So we were going at a trot. The shells were also pounding against the gates — traditional gates with a driveway leading into a courtyard, with wrought-iron Saint Nicholases on the sides or in niches. Against the barricades. The walls.

Before we reached Żelazna Street we had to squeeze through a narrow passageway (there were narrow passageways everywhere between the barricades and the walls as a security measure). After we crossed Żelazna, too. It seems two of them were near each other. Because the barricades were close together. Everywhere. And soldiers were lying down near Żelazna and firing their rifles. Ordinary ones. In the direction of Kercelak. There was panic. Civilians in flight. A desperate defense. News came of those burnings, firing squads, shootings, facts came, came right at us, ever nearer. Once, twice we ran past with those stretchers. The orderly and I were carrying a woman. Covered with ashes. On her hair. And her face. In convulsions. Her dress was shredded. She'd been buried. On Chłodna Street. Right behind us — although the person's (a man's) hands and legs were thickly bandaged, the blood was flowing so profusely that it was pouring off the stretcher. What else was there, farther along — I no longer know. The courthouse. We rush through the gate. People are standing there inside the gate, just some people, ordinary people, one of them our neighbor from 4 °Chłodna. She begins to cry at the sight of all this. I think a general convulsive sobbing began. Throughout the entire courtyard. They told me to set down the woman who had been buried. To leave her there. Because this is the hospital. I think they set down the stretchers. Ran to get the next ones. And these were already being carried inside.

I ran out in order to go home. On the way I dropped in — by the back way behind the sawmill — at 24 Chłodna, to Irena's cellar. I found Irena there and those two owls, and Pan Malinowski, wearing an Antiaircraft Defense armband as a block leader. It was quiet here, more peaceful than anywhere else. At least in the second outbuilding. It didn't face the front. Farther on, you could hear everything. And it was bad. But the peace in that cellar! Just an ordinary cellar. Twisting corridors, a maze of little rooms. Darkness. At most, a gray light fell inside there. It was nothing. I didn't feel like going any farther. I told them. What I had seen. What was on the other side of Żelazna Street. Because they asked. I delayed like that. Delayed. Then it was evening.

They advised me to wait. Here. For the night. Why make your way across Żelazna? Perhaps it's even worse now than it was before, perhaps they're already moving in? From here you can escape. It's closer to Starówka. Almost everyone planned to go to Starówka as soon as they were ready. I talked more and more with those two owls on this theme. The elder, Heńka, her hair combed in an upsweep, was still worrying out loud about her children because they had remained in Praga at Wedel's. The younger — Jadźka, I think — started telling our fortunes. I told them I had a friend on Rybaki Street. Swen. That actually he'd been living in Wola for the past few months, on Szlenkierów Street. That for some reason I think he's on Rybaki now. Because his mother had remained there. Obviously, I had no proof. Intuition, at best. And what is called wishful thinking. That first Teik and Swen had broken off relations with each other over an insignificant matter, that I then broke off relations with Teik out of solidarity with Swen, and in the end I'd broken off relations with Swen and made up with Teik (let me remind you: Teik from Staszic Street) was something I paid no attention to in this situation. Another thing: I came up with the idea of swimming the Vistula. They grasped at that as an obvious plan. I said that Rybaki Street was just the same as Wybrzeże Gdańskie. Because of the apartment blocks. Also red. Poured concrete. Unfinished. Big. (Something of a "shelter for the homeless" during the war; Swen had lived there until recently although he'd been working for a long time as a social worker in the Parysów district.) So those apartment blocks faced Rybaki. The Vistula was behind them. All three of us could swim, we agreed. And from there we could steal out at night toward Żerań—Jabłonna. The Russians were already at Jabłonna. I don't know how we imagined ourselves swimming to the other shore, which was also held by the Germans, and — even better — crossing the front. And such a front at that — a front as probably never had existed in the history of the world before this war. Probably we just assumed that since it was a question of Warsaw and Żerań everything would somehow take care of itself.

We stayed on there. Till night. The attack had ceased. There were the normal small explosions, noises. Maybe it was completely silent. Everyone came out into the yard. Discussions. Gossip. Newssheets. More tunneling. Of cellars, passageways. Pan Malinowski proposed that Irena and I should sleep in his apartment. After all, how can we go up to the fourth floor? And they have a large apartment on the ground floor, in the first courtyard. We go with him. I am given a room. My own. A bed. A quilt. I undress. I fold back the quilt in order to crawl under it, and then — what a noise from a shell hitting the corner of the house! Then a second, a third, a fourth; nothing, only

shells. And flames. Everyone jumps up. Dashes into the courtyard. Waves of people pour into the courtyard from Ogrodowa Street. With suitcases, children, knapsacks. Some are leaving already. Others are gathering here. A crowd. Explosions. Discussions. Moving about from one group to another. Irena is standing there with a haversack. We consult. With Pan Malinowski. And the whole group. We are standing near the gate (wooden) onto Ogrodowa. But Irena is hesitant for some reason. And I think it's high time. I consult the owls. They're ready.

"I'll just run over and take the keys to Mama, because I took them from the apartment."

I really had taken the keys when we walked out of the house during the panic. Now they're always jingling in my pocket. I run over to Żelazna Street. The partisans are lying down on Żelazna again, firing in the direction of Wronia, worn out, sweaty, among piles of rubbish.

"Where to, where to?"

"I've got to. 4 ˚Chłodna."

"What? You can't."

"But my mother. I took the keys."

"Sir! You won't be of any help. The keys are useless, and anyway…"

"But…"

"The Germans are already there."

I retreated. I ran into Irena's courtyard. Heńka and Jadźka were ready. Once again I asked Irena if she'd made up her mind. But she was still standing there near the gate, with the same people, the haversack still hanging from her arm, and what I was saying wasn't getting through to her at all. So Heńka, Jadźka, and I — we rush out into Ogrodowa, this time to the right. At a run…

One of them said, "Let's just take off our shoes so they won't hear us."

We take them off. We run. Barefoot. Along Ogrodowa Street. A barricade. We squeeze through. To Solna. Something's burning. Explosions. Beams are sailing through the air. Noise. They fall into the fire. With a thud. We dash along Solna. To Elektoralna. A barricade. We squeeze through. Onward. Along Elektoralna. To Bank Square (where Dzierżyński Square is today, only smaller and triangular).[5] Something's burning on the right. An entire building — a single flame. We race past. Somewhere beyond Orla Street a whole building is on fire on the left. Actually, it's being consumed by flames. There are hardly any ceilings left. Or walls. Just one huge fire about four stories high. Again the beams groan, collapse. It's hot. That's probably the Office of Weights and Measures. Night. It's quieter here. Maybe the attack is letting up? We are not the only ones in flight. A whole stream

of people is moving in the direction of Starówka. We run left, following a group of people. Into the courtyards — to the rear — of the club, or rather the rotunda, the former Ministry of Finance, and the Leszczyński Palace. There's more space here. It's less crowded. Isolated explosions can be heard from Bank Square. The cornices, again. But not as gray. Yellow. Which means in this dawn (it was barely dawn) they seemed to be covered with gold leaf. Perhaps this is where I saw the pigeons. The ones that flew up. Or just those cornices. Only these are in a different style. With little Corazzi angels. With garlands. Tympanums. The courtyard fronts on Leszno Street. Suddenly it is really dawn. We are detained at a barricade until more people arrive. There are even some Jews with their womenfolk. One of the women was holding a sack under her arm. The barricade cut across Leszno near where it now opens onto the east-west artery. But Rymarska Street was on the right side then, branching off from Bank Square. And to the left was Przejazd with a view, just as today, of the Mostowski Palace. They check the Jews' papers. They are separated from the rest. To help with work. The Jews have bundles under their arms, something like sacks. They let us through. All of us. We race past the Leszno barricades. To Przejazd. A long stretch there. And a turn to the right. Past the barricade. Długa Street. The sound of explosions. After a gentle curve on Długa, the Palace of the Four Winds on the left. The whole building is on fire. It's already destroyed. The flames are howling in the outbuildings, in front. The beams groan, collapse. The tympanum, with its bas-reliefs, is still standing. The twinkling medallions. The carved gates of the inner courtyard. And those Four Winds. On the pillars of the gate. They have gilded wings. They gambol, gleam. They seem to be dancing even more gaily than usual. We run on.

Starówka, at last. You can see it. At the end of Długa Street — past several barricades — a blue-green ball on the bell tower of the Church of the Dominicans is glinting. How strange. The remains of a burnt tin spire? Perhaps. So we rush on — no longer barefoot — we'd put on our shoes at the corner of Leszno and Przejazd, I think — we run along Długa, down Mostowa Street to Rybaki. It's daytime already. And silence. Stare Miasto is quiet as can be. On a bend in Rybaki Street, beyond the Gunpowder Depot, children are playing on the grass among the cobblestones near the wall of the housing estate. The rear of the Gunpowder Depot faced the Vistula, as did the rear of every building on Rybaki Street. That wall I just mentioned was very old. It had two shell-shaped, rococo gates. An old inn. As soon as we'd passed it I said to Heńka and Jadzia, "Right here."

14/16 Rybaki Street. A pair of three-story brick housing blocks, without stucco, on a concrete foundation, with a third block added on,

which struck me as less imposing. Those two housing blocks stood crosswise between Rybaki Street and the Vistula. Between them was a large courtyard. From Rybaki all the way to Wybrzeże. We entered the courtyard through a latticework gate. And walked along the left side against the wall — because the entire center was devoted to garden plots and overgrown — to the stairwell, the one leading to Swen's mother's apartment (perhaps she's there? and perhaps Swen's there, too? — I had an anxious hope). Their stairwell was right near Wybrzeże itself, because their windows, too, looked out onto the Vistula. I look and right inside the entrance to that stairwell two guards are standing, still from the night shift, wearing armbands; one with the red armband of the Armia Ludowa, because here in Starówka there was a large contingent of the AL. And the other, someone I knew both from Swen's home and from his office, Pan Ad….

"Is he in? Swen?" I asked. "Are they at home?"

"They're here. All of them. Swen and his fiancée. And his aunt and her son. And my wife and child."

"Where are they?"

Pan Ad., smiling all the time, said, "In the shelter, they're still sleeping."

Down stairs that smelled of cement and raw bricks we descended into deep cellars with thick walls. Silence. And the odor of a stifling laundry room. It struck our ears and our noses. As for what struck our eyes — it's a shame even to talk about it.

A dusky abyss with flickering candles on a small altar adorned with a porcelain Mother of God, as for the rest — the strangest plots, crowded, everyone sleeping, snoring, disheartening.

These plots turned out to be groups of bunks. Each group was made up of several bunks. Each bunk was made of two or four plank beds merged at their heads. Each was long, for several people lay on it. In the dim light pieces of junk seemed to be floating between the groups of bunks. And only a single main aisle from the door to the altar and around the room could be distinguished. In addition, there were cement pillars. So, the macabre aura of a chapel in the catacombs.

I sought out Swen's family's plot. I saw them in a row. Asleep. I leaned over Swen. And said something. I don't remember what. Swen stretched, looked up at me, was surprised, was moved to tears, began welcoming me. Immediately the rest of them, especially Swen's mother, stirred and started bustling about.

Aunt Uff. and Zbyszek were still asleep. I told them whom I was with. They said that was fine. They told us to find a place. They welcomed us. Gave us some food. Celinka, Aunt Uff., and Zbyszek, and Pani Ad. on the neighboring pallet with her tiny daughter woke

up right after that. Other people too. They stirred. Half rose. Getting up — all the way — was just not done. What for? Just to be crowded together?

So, they stirred, stretched, dug about in their bundles without standing up. And it began: “Buzz-buzz-buzz”—what chattering! Also, I think, Matins near the altar, or rather from the altar or to the altar. The morning or first prayer. There were many other prayers in addition to that one. And chants. As it turned out, there weren’t all that many that first week. Later they became more frequent. And closer together. Until it reached the point that in all the cellars throughout Warsaw people were praying aloud in choruses and in chants, everywhere, and without interruption.

So what next? That time, that entrance was the start of a new, hideously long story of communal life against the background of the possibility of death. What do I remember? Both a lot and a little, and not always in order or day by day. I may confuse the order of some things, the dates (even of events that were rather important, although I have several dates fixed in my mind), the positions of the fronts — both ours and the greater one.

So, I found out that the uprising had caught Aunt Uff. and Zbyszek in a store on Freta Street. A couple of days before we came, life had been transferred from the upper floors to the shelters. Along with everything that could be moved. A neighbor, Bacia, who was deaf but able to speak and sing, only off-key, a woman incorrectly referred to as Baciakowa, brought down her sewing machine and her little son with his legs in a hip-high cast and sewed on that machine in the cellar across from us and sang a lot — Swen laughed — because she could not hear the explosions. The entrance into Baciakowa’s cellar (something that was supposed to be a door but by 1939 was still only a hole) was just one tiny element of the labyrinth under 14/16 Rybaki Street. Because there was an endless number of corridors, cellar rooms with and without pillars, passageways, exits to the staircases, corners, separate vaults, storerooms, bins, subbasements, passages leading to the boiler room with its many pipes and sewer mains. In addition, the two main blocks (A and B) had a connecting passageway, or what was referred to here as the tunnel. Under the garden plots with their pumpkins. And tomatoes. And probably potatoes, which were so much in fashion throughout Warsaw during the occupation that not only the larger and smaller squares (from which in the winter of 1939 those who had been hastily buried in September were exhumed), not only the embankments but even Aleje Jerozolimskie were planted and blossomed with potatoes in July.

Our cellar “hall” appeared to be the main one for this block even though there were two or three others just like it under block B. After

all, the altar was located here. And perhaps it really was the largest? Perhaps. Near the door, that is, near the entrance opening from the stairwell on the right, stood a barrel full of water in case of fire. On August 7 the water was no longer very fresh. Later it produced a stench, quarreling, and the decision to change the water in the barrel by means of a bucket brigade. The door led to the corridors, half cellars, passageways with goats, dogs, stoves over which the women quarreled incessantly and the men were always ready to fight with axes. The second axes in this uprising. From there, stairs led directly from the cement floor to the ground floor upstairs. Immediately to our left were the toilets (the plumbing was still functioning for the time being), everything was in working order, even the lights. Here dusty rays of sunlight shone in from above so that once they had entered early in the morning they shone like that for several hours every day, because the weather was always sunny. Here were the most important comings and goings, meetings, discussions, my sitting on a heap of bricks, and writing.

The cellars began again across the way. A whole new chain of them started over there. Later, this was our famous walking trail. People would go for strolls over there. And it wasn't the same as on the surface. It was here. After all, these were streets, squares, crowds, life, the making of friendships.

Let us return to the date. Swen had fled here with Celinka the day before I had. At five o'clock on August 1 they'd been outdoors, near Chmielna Street. They had run with their arms raised among the tanks on Nowy Świat, it seems. Celinka had her own room, 1 °Chmielna. And it was there that the living together of many people, entangled, yet separate from one another, commenced. Communal living en masse. But what was there to eat? How long would it last? For a couple of years Swen's mother, older, experienced, had been hiding rusks in sacks. So Swen brought Celinka over on Sunday. They crept through half of Śródmieście along a circuitous route. Because there was no other way. Somehow or other they got to Złota Street or Pańska, then to Chłodna by way of Waliców, then along Ogrodowa to Solna, Elektoralna, across Bank Square, finally via Długa to Mostowa, in other words, by Staszek's route from Chłodna to Sienna and mine from Chłodna to Rybaki. The Palace of the Four Winds was already on fire. It was hell in Staszek's and my neighborhoods. Because of the onslaught from Wola. And they, too, had been struck by the silence on Rybaki Street. So they had run up to the third floor. Empty. But there was the silence, the summer weather, and the Vistula, so Swen, assuming that his mother must be downstairs somewhere, went to look for her and told Celinka that she should just look out the window in the meantime. The window looked out directly across the river to

Praga. To the great trees of the zoo. The beach. The railroad bridge, the old one on the left, near the Citadel. To the right — Kierbedź bridge with its latticework. It was a good thing that there wasn't any firing from Praga then, because Celinka would have been in trouble. When the people in the shelters found out about her, they clutched their heads. So he quickly ran to fetch her.

Swen asked me almost immediately whether I'd heard the latest hit song, "Do you remember the hot July nights…" And I learned right away that the Ads.' tiny daughter was named Basia. And that they sang to her:

I have a puppet on a string,
He hops to the left, he hops to the right,
And that is the greatest fun…

They sang that song to her over and over again throughout August. And when I remember it I become as sad as can be, from the melody and those words, I don't know why. (The entire Ad. family, all three of them, survived everything; they are all alive, but I hadn't encountered them for years until one beautiful June day several years ago Basia came to see me, introduced herself, told me who she is, that my writing poetry interests her, and that it seems I knew her when she was a young child in the shelter, and then it developed into a close friendship until in the end Basia married an Italian Polonist and is living in Florence now even though after we had left and they stayed on there on Rybaki Street her mother, Róża, said to her, "Don't cry, you won't live anyway." They were even driven in front of a tank.) I also learned later that they lined up a crowd of people against the walls of the Citadel and that's when Pani Róża kicked off her shoes, which were hampering her. Then they transported them away. And she was barefoot all that time.

Well, that day Jadźka and this other woman, Swen and Celinka (I think), and I ran to Mostowa Street. Uphill. Past three or four barricades. Not the kind of barricades that were erected at the beginning, nor even the kind that we put up six days later on Ogrodowa Street; these were made of concrete slabs piled up to a great height, fortified with sand, bristling with metal rods that had been hammered into the earth. They were absolutely impregnable. It was only then that I looked at all of this with disbelief. Because it was here that the uprising began to look as if it came out of a book. The kind about a siege. From the Middle Ages. And about an exotic, sweltering city. Where people start eating the bark from the trees and the soles of their shoes. But here, after all, the danger was practically on top of us. We were encircled. There were assaults, too. And when they happened… but more about that later. Also the sky. And the heat. And the crowds. My head almost began spinning from

amazement. I can remember that feeling to this day. Even to the burning in my nose.

So, we ran uphill along Mostowa Street (there was the escarpment and those inclines). To the corner of Freta Street. To the store. Straight ahead. Unbelievable. The store was open. But in a strange sort of way. Almost open (ajar). But they were selling. What? Kasha, I think. Bread? I think we bought those two items. In any case we bought something. For the first and last time. Because I didn't see any other stores either before or after that.

There was so much congestion on the sidewalks that people were walking in the roadways. They were crowded with refugees from all over Warsaw. Everyone who had fled from Wola was here. Stare Miasto, the Old City, was a famous redoubt. (Already famous.) Impregnable. Barricades. Serpentine streets. Not for tanks. Stare Miasto is strong. Its walls are solid. Thick. And also… Tradition.

Chance meetings. Passing Irena P. with her haversack. She had joined the AK. Teik hurrying into action at the head of a squad, which was walking rapidly single file over the cobblestones of Mostowa near Stara, and either he didn't notice us or it made no difference to him, so occupied was he and they with what they were headed to. Actually, I don't know if I met him twice on Mostowa in August or if the first time was on the corner of Chłodna and Żelazna Streets when I was returning home on Saturday from Irena's. On Rybaki, I think (those two times — with an interval between them). Because otherwise I wouldn't keep getting those people in single file, his uniformed soldiers, confused with those Boy Scouts in uniform (as I did in my first draft). Then again, if it was two times on Mostowa, then the first time I met him by myself and the second time was when I was running with Swen. Enough of that for now. I have a feeling that Teik's meeting with Swen came later, so there'll be more about that later on.

Something else — from that walk, which reminded me for some reason of the mood in 1939 because it was also summertime, something triumphant and disastrous. I'd like to talk about Długa Street. Długa was the most important street in that section of Warsaw. Also the widest. And the most elegant. At that time, at least. Because, according to what I heard then, the most important offices were located there even at the start, including the headquarters of the People's Army.[6] I have already mentioned that Długa had two roadways between Krasiński Square and Freta. Between these roadways was a series of two or three small plazas. Which lent it chic. Like a boulevard. There were also some plots of grass there. Loudspeakers were blaring on both sides of the street. And there was lots of talking. Flags were hanging in every doorway. Large numbers

of people were sitting on the iron balconies. That I remember. And I remember that an elegant automobile with the Polish national flag on it was squeezing its way through the crowds of people.

In the evening, Heńka and Jadźka were in our cellar, not in our corner but in theirs (they had found a corner for themselves)— bunks against a wall near a pillar in another nave… Jadźka, on her bunk, told Swen's and my fortunes from cards. She even divined some significant details. About life. Mine I don't remember, but for Swen: very, very characteristic coincidences of the figures on the cards, and that she blurted it out to him without thinking, finally risking the vividness of the news about him (from the cards).

What else? Prayer. I'm sure Swen had begun to lead the prayers by then. No. Not yet. That's right. It was still a woman. One. Swen two or three days later. He'd refused. He read the newssheets out loud (I pass directly to that because it was an equivalent liturgy); he would stand right in the center of everything, in the main aisle of the main nave, since we've already blundered into such a comparison, and rightly so since there were three naves. He always stood near the right side of the aisle, close to the entrance, near a bunk and, I think, a pillar, but perhaps I'm adding that detail from my imagination. Two women would take two candles from the altar to illuminate the latest news. Not necessarily once a day. Just as with prayer. In the morning and the evening, too. At least. So the women would take the candles from the altar. And light them. They would draw close to Swen as if for the recitation of the Gospels and stand on either side of him. Deaconesses. I was the subdeacon or sacristan. The rest of our family sat close by on a bunk. Swen stood at the center of our circle and of the larger circle of the pressing crowd the first of whom would be sitting or squatting and the more distant ones standing as he read. But they always listened intently. To what was reported. Because it was important. And how! Everyone grew quiet then. Right from the start. Yes, it was truly very pious. The reading, that is. There were several newssheets or placards of assorted sizes published by various editorial committees — either by the Home Army[7] or the People's Army or the Civil Defense. The reading would be accompanied by mass scowling, complaints, wringing of hands, or outbursts of joy.

Let's move on. For a certain number of days I'll be getting things confused. Until August 15. Except that on the twelfth — I've recalled what took place then — something happened. And something else on the thirteenth. Something notorious, at that. Until then. Here's what I've recalled: a tram driver and his girl on the bunk across the way, practically beside the barrel. Somehow they were also near the door, the unfinished door to the stairwell, but also somehow near the pillar, although a moment ago it seemed to me they were near the wall. In

any case, they were close to us, within earshot. They had a carbide lamp. And they were using it. But I can remember many such lamps in the darkness. The concrete darkness. Or the darkness behind the pillar. Or perhaps it's because they changed places later. Although also close by. Or that everything was in darkness. That's it, I'm sure. They said they were a couple. Not married. He was large-boned. In a navy-blue tram driver's uniform. She… For some reason I remember her mostly from above — her disheveled hair, bushy, tangled. Against the background of the carbide lamp. That hair. She, too, was large-boned. She wore a suit of sorts or, rather, a jacket. A gray check or a salt-and-pepper pattern. They were relatively young, fairly good-looking and pleasant, and through all this they were in love. We got to know them. Or rather it happened like this: on one side, the one near the altar, we became friendly with the Ads., and on the other side, the side with the barrel and the exit, with the tram-driver couple.

I'm going back for a while to August 7, to that first day in Stare Miasto. What else did I learn? Right at the beginning? In general, that swimming across the Vistula would be… Well, I didn't ask about it right away because I was embarrassed. I sensed immediately that it wasn't right to inquire about it right off. After a while I screwed up my courage and asked, in a half whisper at that; Swen shrugged his shoulders and burst out laughing. "Whaat?… Go take a look… The embankment is covered with barbed wire, the tanks are out, and at night the searchlights keep raking the Vistula and the shores."

Naturally that convinced me immediately, since I'd really been convinced from the very first moment we entered that terrain and that shelter. Jadźka and Heńka also heard him. And gave up just as I did. Anyway, they were blind instincts. First you wanted to go here. Then there. In Wola there was the dread of mass shootings and burnings. So a person wanted to escape from that hell by some miracle. But here something else popped into one's head from the start. A new mood. All over again. And I know, just as surely as I know myself and every average Varsovian, that I would have wanted to return immediately from that miraculous salvation outside of Warsaw to this hell. After all, in 1939 my parents and I had fled as far away as Zdołbunów, so that I wasn't even in Warsaw after September 5, and throughout September I was disconsolate at not being here. And when people told me what had happened, and wrung their hands, and mentioned September 23, 24, 25, I wanted to know about those days in particular. Throughout the entire occupation I regretted that I hadn't been there on September 25 during the famous bombardment from eight in the morning until eight at night.[8] When Nanka, Sabina, and Michał were on Ogrodowa Street at the corner of Wronia in Olek's ground-floor apartment. (Olek — the brother of Zosia Romanowska,

the woman who with Olek's wife left for Grochów on September 8, to her sister and brother-in-law's in Kawcza, and all four of them perished instantly because their lock snapped shut, they were searching for their keys, the planes flew over, and they'd already raced down to the cellar, and only their daughter Hania survived who was living in Zosia's place, and it was our Stefa who took on the identity of Zosia Romanowska, so that the dead had even saved us then.) Well, according to what Sabina told us, Nanka stayed there, not moving an inch the entire time, huddled over and clutching at her liver. So now I had what I'd wanted. Yet I wanted to flee. But had I fled, I repeat, I would have regretted not having experienced what I was about to experience. That's why I feel so sorry for those who died in the bombardment. The thrill of the experience passed them by. Such an adventure and all for nothing. That one might not survive — that's another question entirely. But let's not bother with such deliberations for now. Anyway, there will be more and more of them. Not because I suddenly have a craving for them. But because in that life they were the very stuff of life. Imagining what might take place or what would definitely take place a moment later accounted for at least half of one's thoughts. The rest were devoted to taking care of various immediate needs— food, shelter, clothing. It was summertime and hot, so there wasn't any particular difficulty with the latter, because one could get along with nothing, just a fairly threadbare suit with clumps of dirt on the pants legs, and shoes with holes in them — in other words, we worried about the immediate needs of bare subsistence, what touched our skins, and finally, about that threat from the Vistula and, even worse, from the sky. Memories have pushed back the rest. It is difficult to say "memories" in the strict sense of the word. Because there are memories from the day before yesterday. And memories from an hour ago. Memories from Wola and others fresh from Mostowa Street. Everything was rehashed. Over and over. Along with possibilities, with what might have been. Against the background of what was happening. Obviously there must have been a break for talking, too. And a rather long one at that. Especially since talk was focused precisely on those themes. By and large.

And I also found out — something. That Celinka — Swen laughed uncontrollably as he told me this — was still going to work on Miodowa Street every day. To the Health Center. But her Health Center was in Parysów. She went to the local one with a girlfriend whom she'd met here. Swen didn't go.

"So they were supposed to go there and work in the office every day until today when they got there, there was no more center!" And Swen doubled over with laughter. And so did I. Celinka, too. "They were on duty for a long time!"

During those first days we used to walk to the corner of Mostowa and Stara Streets, or rather, past the corner along Stara itself, to the right of Mostowa, to get free dinners from some nuns. I don't remember what kind of nuns they were. Stara ran along the embankment from Mostowa Street so that it went high, then low, and became even higher toward Nowe Miasto, right up to the Rynek. These nuns where we took our meals were located across from the rear of the Church of the Dominicans. But the garden of the Dominicans stretched all the way to Rybaki Street. Or, rather, their grounds, intersected by Stara Street and perhaps by those nuns, too, ran down along the escarpment to the very end, at the base of the cliff all the way to Rybaki, and were separated from Rybaki by an ancient, utterly old-fashioned wall, white, with a gate over which was carved (in metal, so it was like a real one) a monstrance, the symbol of Saint Jacek Odrowąż, our Polish holy man of the Middle Ages from Stare Miasto, a Dominican, the patron saint of the Church of the Dominicans, which actually was called Saint Jacek's. The church at the fork in Długa Street whose bell-tower spire had burned until it shone green. So that wall (white, thick and white!), on the left side of Rybaki as one walked from Mostowa, from the escarpment to Swen's place, began not so very far past the corner, past the apartment house, at the courtyard, and right afterwards there was that gate with the monstrance in a curve along the sidewalk, only not paved with concrete slabs but with cobblestones, a triangle like the one directly opposite it, the one past the Gunpowder Depot where those children were playing in the grass early in the morning (because there was definitely grass growing there), I even think I remember that beneath the Dominican monstrance a kind of braided grass was growing with leaves on drooping stalks, and chamomile I think, the common variety, low, the kind that likes to grow between cobblestones. The garden, because there was a fruit and vegetable garden to feed the Dominicans and their students and wards (they had several), stretched out in length and breadth and was visible as you walked uphill from down below. And farther on in the direction of Kościelna Street it bordered on the apartment houses on Rybaki and on the gardens of the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament, who also were situated on the escarpment and also provided food. Anyway, a lot more will be said about this. And in more detail. Because this terrain will be very important.

For various reasons. Well, people would stand in line at this convent on Stara Street for the aforementioned gruel. I don't say "gruel" at all disparagingly because it was a real luxury at that time and a sign of goodwill to serve soup, especially if it was good and thick. People stood with their large pots on the street and along the

stairs leading into the red building. The one across from the white Dominicans. The monastery. Massive, baroque, situated high up on the escarpment, practically on its summit. (And everything was white because they loved that color. They also wear white habits, though with black trim, it's true, and the Polish Dominicans even use a thick red sash as a belt; they have been granted that privilege because the Tatars once slaughtered the Dominicans in Sandomierz, which probably won't be of any interest to you until you see the display cases in Sandomierz, in the church, with the recently exhumed skulls of those Dominicans, split by Tatar hatchets; a hatchet is even still buried in one skull — after it sank in it couldn't be pulled out.) The whiteness remains all the more firmly engraved in my memory because of the heat, August, and the smoke, and because sometimes the sky was white from smoke and from the scorching heat, and the Gunpowder Depot was white like that, and the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament were white, that is, their high church, which was also visible from below, with its sky-blue cupola, so that it was also linked with the sky. In addition, there were Pauline Fathers (the Paulines have been in Poland only in the twentieth century). Paulines are dressed entirely in white — although it's true their church building was here without them because in the nineteenth century the tsar dissolved the Paulines and the Dominicans and the Benonites, who were in Nowe Miasto behind the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament, and he converted their church into Bieńkowski's knife factory (that is, the tsar approved the change and so it remained until the uprising, about which there'll be more later because it is also significant in the action). But there were definitely some representatives of those orders. There was a priest from Saint Jacek's and there were the Pauline Fathers whose church was across from the Dominicans so that it fronted on Nowomiejska where Mostowa empties into it, just as the Dominicans across from them were at the outlet onto Długa Street as I have already explained. But the Pauline Fathers had two towers, baroque, which had not burned but were still intact, and they had a double stairway leading up to the main doors. Against the background of all the goldenness created by the gold leaf stood the Mother of God surrounded by lamps. And all this could be seen from below, from the corner of Mostowa and Rybaki Streets, and the Mother of God stood at the end of a long, long uphill climb, steep, over cobblestones. In connection with this I remind you that Mostowa had an extension leading to the Vistula. Only it was called something else. Boleść? Street. The left side of Boleść, coming from the escarpment, was, above all, the side of the Gunpowder Depot. Boleść Street led all the way to the embankment, just as it does to this day, as it did then and as it had for centuries past, when it had been important, when the

bridge — still just a low, pontoon bridge — started not from Bednarska Street but rather from Mostowa itself. Actually, when you walked along it toward Praga, in addition to the trees that were already immense during the uprising (though perhaps in the past they once were small), straight ahead, in addition to those trees, was the center of Praga. With the Ratusz.[9] Ratuszowa Street began at the place where Mostowa would have been had it continued across the Vistula. And the Church of the Mother of God of Loreto. Baroque. The so-called church within a church. Perhaps I am speaking too much about these monuments. But they were important. Because they were perishing with us. We could see Praga. The escarpment and everything I've described was above us. And the fact that they were holy places is also not irrelevant. Stare Miasto was the seat of the Armia Ludowa. And also the concentration of our holy places and of the clergy. I am writing about this sympathetically. Because there is much good to be said about the clergy. After all, it began precisely because of those soups. My amazement, I mean. Not only were they not refusing people, they were even urging them. To eat whatever was served. The wait in line was quickly over with. Waiting itself didn't take long. People weren't impatient. Just as with everything then. We didn't grow impatient. After all, we were standing among companions. Family, friends, or new acquaintances. Right away there was conversation. All one's acquaintances. Friends. It was even pleasant. As I remember it. Except for those planes. We would flee somewhere into the shadows. And then once more move to those steps. Holding our mess kits. I remember having something that clinked and was lightweight. And I think we ate on the spot, right away, on those cobblestones, in the gutter. How long did that last? Not so long, I think. The daily trips. That means those poor nuns just cooked and cooked. What I want to say is that what happened to the institution on Miodowa Street suddenly happened to them, too. Just as it did to everything else. Anyway, sometime around August 13 it was all over with those soups. Standing on Stara Street, with its view, standing on the escarpment, just being outdoors, became impossible. And now I recall that it was while we were going for soup one afternoon, I think, that I saw Teik climbing uphill rapidly, followed by a line of people in battle dress. So it seems as if one time he was connected with the shop. And a second time, with the soup. Chłodna Street was probably an illusion.

All of this is like one prolonged illusion. An awfully trite tale. But only this suits me. For what was felt then. Because you didn't have to be a poet to have things multiplying in your head. If I write very little about my impressions. And everything in ordinary language. As if nothing happened. Or if I hardly ever look inside myself, or seemingly

from the outside. It is only because it can't be done any other way. After all, that is how we experienced things. And, generally speaking, that is the only device, not an artificially constructed one but the only completely natural device. To convey all of this. For twenty years I could not write about this. Although I wanted to very much. I talked. About the uprising. To so many people. All sorts of people. So many times. And all along I was thinking that I must describe the uprising, somehow or other *describe* it. And I didn't even know that those twenty years of talking — I have been talking about it for twenty years — because it is the greatest experience of my life, a closed experience — precisely this talking is the only device suited to describing the uprising.

Let us return to the action. Around August 13. Bombs had fallen. On Stare Miasto. Obviously, on Miodowa Street even earlier. But in those days Miodowa wasn't as clearly included within Stare Miasto as it was later when it was completely cut off from the rest of Warsaw along with Stare Miasto, just like all of Długa Street and even Bielańska and Przejazd — they were all Stare Miasto. We didn't speak of them as belonging anywhere else. And perhaps that whole business is reflected to this day. That it is Stare Miasto. Later on, I shall give other examples of such topographic redefinitions. All the same, the bombs fell on Muranów, too. The street leading from Bonifraterska to the Vistula. That is, the one from Stare Miasto — or, more precisely, from Nowe Miasto. And people began to call it, too, Stare Miasto. And it has remained Stare Miasto to this day. Or Nowe Miasto. And I am not confusing these two entities here because Nowe Miasto is a part of Stare Miasto. Well, the bombs were falling on Muranów, on Zakroczymska Street, and they struck a huge fuel tank. There was a monstrous explosion. A number of people died. So that it became known as the Muranów incident. Among us. I remember that the first bombs dropped on Stare Miasto landed on the corner of Mostowa and Nowomiejska Streets. Where today — if I'm not mistaken — the Nowomiejski cafeteria is located. Between the walls and Mostowa Street. The present walls. Because at that time there were no walls on that side of Mostowa and Nowomiejska as you face the Vistula. They just ended on Nowomiejska Street. There wasn't a barbican either. Because it was immured in the Gdańsk Cellar. In a stone building by that name. Well, the bombs landed somewhere — on the house in which the shop was situated (the shop where we had bought something that first day), or on the building across the street from it. And it was then I understood that it had finally begun. That there was nothing we could count on anymore. Not even half a day of peace. That my Stare Miasto vacation was over. Which could have been foreseen from the beginning. From my arrival there. But actually the

difference was that *it* had finally begun. It was no longer just a premonition. It *was*. When we reached Stara Street all of a sudden it was nothing but a pile of red bricks, dust, and the steps. Perhaps the first bombs were already falling then on the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament. Perhaps they'd already begun to burn. Because they did burn down to the ground. By stages. Whatever they had there. Something also happened to the Dominicans, I think.

A gunboat was patrolling the Vistula and shelling us. And on the far shore the Germans seemed to be sitting in those tall trees watching us through binoculars. It was said that they saw and heard everything.

Tanks thundered along Wybrzeże and occasionally strayed into Kościelna Street, up to the first barricade. I don't know exactly what happened to those tanks. Because by then a saying with which people frightened themselves had already become popular: "Quiet! There's a tank on the other side of the wall."

And the entire shelter would repeat "Quiet! There's a tank outside the wall…"

Even the gentlemen with the red armbands liked to say that out loud.

Swen would laugh uproariously at that. But the tank outside the wall was really there a few times, it seems. Because once — I'm watching — high up in a little red window in a small cellar a partisan was waiting, squatting, bent over, with a bottle of kerosene in his hand. But that was probably later on.

What else happened in those first four or five days on Rybaki?

A pumpkin expedition. I think it was around that time. In that courtyard. Which means that in the course of two or three days things had changed so drastically that dashing at full speed into the yard to pick two pumpkins and rushing back with them into the stairwell entrance had become terribly risky. We cut up the pumpkins (or gourds) into slices and ate them immediately with our so-called family. The food situation was becoming difficult. Now, with the entrapment of districts in the fortress, how long could it last? And also, how could we dig when shells and bombs were falling here? For the time being, Stare Miasto and a part of Muranów and Stawki, which is to say, the warehouses on Stawki, were living off those warehouses. There were continuous battles to keep them in our hands. Just as there were battles for the power plant on Powiśle. We lost the waterworks more quickly. That was the first catastrophe: no water. The second, a little later: We lost the power plant — no light. The third, a local catastrophe for Stare Miasto: the loss of Stawki — and hunger. The Sisters of the Holy Sacrament were still saving people then as best they could. But more about that later.

But what was it really like? As we already know, Wola had fallen.

Mokotów was holding out. Żoliborz, too. Czerniaków. Powiśle. Most of Śródmieście. They were all ours. Of course, not literally all of Mokotów or all of Żoliborz or Czerniaków. That's an important point — that they weren't entirely ours. Surface communication was becoming more difficult all the time. Soon the news reached us that communication had been established with Czerniaków, Żoliborz, Mokotów, but only via the sewers. Plus the fact that — as people said — you would have to walk part of the way to Czerniaków on your knees. A storm sewer (on Krasiński Street, I think) made communication with Żoliborz even more complicated: The Hitlerites would open the manholes there from time to time and toss grenades into the sewer or (this I now know from films) would bar the exits with barbed wire and hang grenades on it.[10]

Despite this, communication was uninterrupted. (People were dying above ground, too. What difference did it make!) The couriers were mainly girls or young boys. Surface communication was maintained with Powiśle for a longer time. That is, between Śródmieście and Powiśle. And for the time being we had surface communication with Śródmieście, too. True, it was terribly problematic. And probably very costly.

What did people do in the shelter?

They talked. Sometimes I would walk through the corridor to the central cellar, the one with the wing where sunlight entered from above, and I would sit there and write. There were many prayer sessions in which people participated. At that time I was still something of a believer. (No doubt, some people will look upon this skeptically or ironically. Or they will refer to it mockingly, which infuriates me, although I won't say anything because I simply have an emotional tie with it.) People waited for the newssheets. Which arrived several times a day. Because there were many presses. The AK's. The AL's. The PL's. I don't know if Civil Defense had its own. Right-wing sheets also appeared (the *Warszawianka*, for example). We didn't discriminate among them then as we should have. We thought, if they were Polish, they were Polish. Anyway, the fascistic ones didn't appear in Stare Miasto. The Home Army and the People's Army were there. They accepted each other. And the people accepted both of them. After some initial sparring, as I recall, they simply grew accustomed to each other. And there was harmony.

More about our occupations. We started taking strolls. Swen and I. A stroll consisted of our linking arms and walking through all the cellars of our block in turn. At the end of the chain of our block B there was a tunnel. A long one. Covered with cement. Under the courtyard. Under those potatoes and pumpkins. And we frequently went through this tunnel on an inspection tour of the second chain of

shelters, beneath block A. To be precise I should add (later I will be talking not only about specific details but about our life in this terrain) that two additional lateral blocks also belonged to block B, smaller ones, which actually formed a single unit with our block, although one of them had its own triangular courtyard. So, that is where we walked. Our strolls lasted a long time. Because there were many people in each cellar. In the corridors and the narrow passageways, too. And there were also little cellars along the way. Without doors. Just open compartments. We had new acquaintances in one of them. A young couple. We used to go there to gossip and to listen to their cricket. Because there was a cricket in the wall there. Actually, there were other crickets, too. But this one was the loudest. In one of the most distant of the large cellars we found an acquaintance, Leonard. He was usually sitting on some bundles, probably not his own. He was alone. Or perhaps he sat on some small bricks? Skinny. With glasses. And he had on a white coat. That's right. Leonard lived on Rybaki Street. At number 23, I think. In a five-story apartment house on the side of Rybaki that wasn't ours. Facing the escarpment. I shall write more about Leonard's building, which was still standing then. About this building that was still standing (so either Leonard came here earlier in search of a safer place since our cellars, after all, were made of reinforced concrete, or I have placed various events about a week too early), about this building of Leonard's I'll write more later. About a bi-level apartment house traversed by the route to Nowe Miasto, at first one of two in all Starówka and later the only one that remained until the very end. Leonard definitely dropped in on us at times. But I remember him more often in his own cellar. In the bright illumination of an electric bulb. Perhaps it only seemed bright then. Because there was so much darkness. Underground. Against the background of the red walls. Because the walls there were terribly red. The same, after all, as ours. However, I think they didn't have cement pillars there. I think Leonard was very sad during our last meetings. Undecided. About where he should go. When his home no longer existed. He was trying to decide, like us, whether he should go up to the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament. Finally, one day he told us he was going there. I think. On our next walk we didn't see him. Later there was no way we could meet him. Only after the war and after our return to Warsaw did we find out that that's what he had done. That he had gone to the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament. And that he was buried there with the rest of the people. Then, in 1946 or so, someone else said that he'd been buried alive at the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament but that he'd made his way to a small window, had dug himself out, and that, it seems, he'd just walked away from there. But then someone else said, I think,

that that was probably not true. Especially since neither we nor anyone else at all has seen Leonard since the uprising. Nor even heard about him being alive since the uprising.

People had settled in the tunnel although there was also the most traffic and occasionally a draft there. A terrible draft at any hour of the day and night, despite the heat. In fact, it eventually became cold there. Once, when we were wandering about the cellars during a terrible bombardment of our blocks, we were driven by blind, dumb instinct in the direction of block A. Through the tunnel. Naturally. The whole family with all our bundles. After all, on one of our walks there we had found my distant cousin — Aunt Trocińska, the sister-in-law of Aunt Józia. I might not even have recognized her. But she tugged at my sleeve joyfully. She had been living in block A during the occupation. So she was there under her own house. And after her first shelters had become unbearable, she'd moved to the tunnel. She was alone. She had only a few belongings. I remember that she lived right beside the door that led from block A. She insisted that we move there. Swen and I quickly returned to our family, to the first cellar. And in the evening, probably quite late, almost at night, we enthusiastically marshaled our entire family, who trudged along after us through the tunnel to a wall near the same door as Aunt Trocińska. There were still only a few people in the tunnel. Just those drafts, the slamming of doors, and people rushing through with or without bundles, faster and faster because one probably can't speak of slowness during the uprising. That same night, I think, many more people settled down near us in the tunnel. In the morning the tunnel was already congested. We remained there not more than thirty-six hours. Perhaps not even that long. We weren't frightened away by the people. Just by the drafts. During the first night we were already freezing. And probably the second night drove us out. Right at the beginning. There wasn't very much to cover ourselves with, after all. Why have such useless luxuries when it was summertime? And when it smelled of heat and fires everywhere? Again I've run ahead of myself.

We recognized an engineer in the cellars of block A. Later, when Swen was leading the prayers in front of our altar, we collaborated on writing a real litany. I remember from this litany:

From bombs and airplanes — save us, Lord,
From tanks and Goliaths — save us, Lord,
From shells and grenades — save us, Lord,
From fires and being burned alive — save us, Lord,
From being shot to death — save us, Lord,
From being buried — save us, Lord…

The litany was quite long. We recited it one evening. Aloud. It

caught on immediately. The other cellars began reciting it, too. I remember that we wrote it down for the engineer. The next evening that engineer met us and said, “Do you know, at this moment fifteen hundred people in my block are reciting your litany.”

There were at least three thousand of us at that one address. There were three hundred or three hundred fifty partisans alone. They kept coming in. Just like the civilians. From other bombed-out houses. Like Leonard.

Swen’s recitation of prayers stemmed more from his acting ability than from piety. Before that, the prayers were rather monotonous. They became interesting when Swen took over. And more sensible. In addition to his acting ability, Swen had a sense of what was vital or, rather, of the most urgent needs. After one evening prayer, I think it was the day when the men were fighting with axes near the entrance to the little shelter (they really didn’t do any harm to each other, in the final analysis), Swen turned from the altar to face everyone.

“Please, let us swear to each other that we will not quarrel.”

“We swear,” the entire crowd repeated obediently.

And it actually helped. At least for a while. Then Swen repeated it. And again the shelter obediently swore. Again it helped for a while. So they weren’t just words.

I am returning now to the course of events. To the friendly tram couple. The date, August 12, is connected with them.

On August 12 a few people left our shelter as was common during the daytime to run some errands, I don’t know for what exactly — for food, water, to do rescue work, perhaps for a duty tour on the barricades — and the tram driver was among them. For the time being, we had become accustomed to the shells. To the bombardment. From Praga. From the gunboat on the Vistula. And from the armored train on the tracks at the Gdańsk Station. These shellings weren’t as frequent yet as they were to become a little later. In any case, August 12 itself was a turning point. In the afternoon, while they were gone, Stare Miasto suddenly shook from several repeated explosions and strong wind blasts. It was something entirely new, like a typhoon. It seemed clear to us that the upper floors throughout lower Starówka had been torn off. At any rate, people said that all the roofs had been ripped off. An unknown weapon. And people did have a feel for the varieties of weapons. They rushed out to check. And returned with the news about the roofs. That it was something really bad. Some sort of “V.” Panic erupted. What could it be? But not for long. Because shortly afterward the same thing was repeated. Until then the nights had been peaceful. There were no planes during the night. There were sudden artillery attacks. And other things. Such as tanks. But from then on this new weapon — mine throwers — began stalking us,

especially at night and more and more frequently several times a night.

There were also flamethrowers. We didn't know what they looked like. Either of them. At first you could only hear three to six creaking screeches and right afterwards just as many explosions and wind blasts. People used to say when they heard those screeches, "They're cranking up the wardrobe again…"

And right away a humorous verse about the cranking up of the wardrobe appeared, and we even read it in the newspaper.

Throwers — that was a proper name. Because those wind blasts threw us and the walls about.

But let us return to the tram driver's girlfriend. She waited for him till evening. He didn't return. She didn't sleep that night. She cried. He didn't return in the morning. We consoled her. I think we stopped consoling her several hours later. Because there was no longer any reason to. At this moment I'm no longer so certain that that was on the twelfth. But maybe it was. There's only one thing that makes me uncertain. The next day was the thirteenth. The famous day of the explosion of the Goliath on Długa Street.[11] So perhaps I'm right after all. Even before the Goliath, on the morning or the afternoon of the thirteenth, the tram driver's girlfriend asked us, "Could you help me search for him in the hospitals?"

"Of course!"

And the three of us — she, Swen, and I — raced to the city.

Or perhaps it was the fourteenth after all? Because the thirteenth was a Sunday. But no. Only two Sundays and one holiday, definitely August 15, a Sunday and a holiday. Sundays didn't differ from each other in any way. How could they? After all, which of the eyewitnesses has ever associated the explosion of the Goliath with a Sunday? That's probably proof.

That a short period of time appeared long is not surprising. Every day people would say, "It's already the twelfth day of the uprising." "It's already the thirteenth day of the uprising."

It seemed as if we already had entire years of this behind us, and what was there ahead of us? There never had been, nor would there ever be, anything else, only the uprising. Which it was impossible to endure much longer. Each day it was impossible to endure it much longer. Then each night. Then every two hours. Then every fifteen minutes. Yes. People kept track of time incessantly. They listened to the air or felt the ground to see if it was trembling or not. Where are they? The eastern front? Somewhere beyond the Vistula, or where? In Wiśniewa? In Piekiełko? People listened to the radio or to those who listened to the radio, which is to say, to what was happening in the west. There too (since June) a front was on the move. French cities

were being liberated. Belgian cities. And us? There were parachute drops. Arms. They flew over more than once. First those from the west. The Allies. Mostly they were Poles in those planes. Mostly or exclusively. Someone told a story about how once a whole fleet of those airplanes flying from somewhere in England or Africa with supplies for us struck a cold air front over the Alps (I think). All the engines froze. And all of them crashed on the spot. Once at night an airplane from the Union of South Africa crashed right in front of our eyes. Into Praga. Another crashed on Miodowa Street. Where it joins Krasiński Square. Right onto the barricade that already had a tram car on top of it. The fliers were pulled out. I happened to meet them — that August 13—by accident. They were Poles. Too.

Where Długa Street intersects Kiliński near the Garrison Church on the side facing the Vistula, of course, new hospitals had been set up in various cellars. Organized right at that time. Mainly because of the Goliath. According to a version I heard recently from an acquaintance of mine, a teacher who was there, on August 13, on that incomprehensible Sunday, late in the day, probably after sundown, a Goliath released by the Germans turned into Freta Street from Świętojerska. Just a little tank. Rather, a robot tank. At first no one knew that it had been set loose. Rather, it appeared to have been abandoned. Or allowed to come close. And it was captured by the Poles. At once crowds of people rushed up to cheer. They followed the trophy, walking alongside of it. They turned from Freta into Długa. And somewhere near the exit onto Kiliński Street, when the euphoria had reached its peak and the balconies were jammed with people, a catastrophe occurred. The timing mechanism went off. The balconies were left with lots of figures draped over the iron railings. The majority of the corpses, pieces of legs, hands, guts, clothing were found in the garden plots at the center. Those new hospitals came into being that night. My teacher friend had two brothers who were taking part in the action. One — the elder — perished in a skirmish. The other, just a boy, was helping with something over there. He was always rushing about. That's what he was doing then, too. They, my friend and her mother, that is (they had escaped from Wola), were sitting in the cellar when the younger brother was on Długa. His sister (my friend) rushed outside. She searched for him. After the explosion. Because someone told her that the kid had been there. And in the garden, grassless at that time, on the bare earth, she found a piece of his leg with his shoe still on it. Someone said, however, that her kid brother was alive and no doubt was in the new hospital. She wanted to go inside. But they wouldn't let her in. Because they were just setting it up. By the next day the hospital had already been bombed. Irena P., when I saw her again during the uprising in Starówka, I

think, said (she too had been there then) that they'd had to collect the guts with shovels.

When we rushed out with the tram driver's girlfriend onto Rybaki Street, we first checked the hospital on the corner of Rybaki and Boleść. In the Gunpowder Depot. There was a hospital there on the ground floor. The tram driver wasn't there. They told us that if the wounded man wasn't from the military it was more likely that he was somewhere on Długa.

Rybaki Street already looked different from what it had been like at the beginning. Every few steps there were barricades of earth, steel rails, paving stones, and concrete with narrow little crannies near the wall. The walls of the old driveway and the two shell-like gates of chipped plaster were pockmarked. The houses were already losing their normal contours. Their height. The lines of their façades.

From the corner of Boleść we turned back a short way in the direction from which we had come (Kościelna). Right at the bend, as has already been described, was the wall at which the gardens of the Dominicans, dropping down from the hill and intersected by Stara Street, came to an end. In this wall, described several pages back, was the gate that has also been described already, the same gate with the monstrance that marked the beginning of the Staromiejski route from lower to upper Stare Miasto. After dashing through the gate you immediately made a sharp left turn. Then you raced toward the garbage bin near the opposite wall. You jumped onto the table placed beside it. From the table onto the garbage bin. From the garbage bin (a bin of the old kind with a lid) through a hole in the wall. And you were on a slightly higher level, or, rather, at the bottom of the courtyard from which you could scurry along a board through a window, from the window into someone's apartment, from that apartment through a hole in the wall into some other dark place that was at ground-floor level at one end but was a cellar in the middle of the building. There you landed blindly amid a crowd of people who were sitting or lying down, some of whom were even wounded. Some of them cried out, "Jesus!… don't trample us… Jesus!"

From there, you raced along various turnings in the dark up to some higher place, out into the courtyard. From that yard through a gate. Out to Mostowa Street. Here you ran across the street at an angle, stealthily, behind the barricade. Across cobblestones. From there you could always see a bit of blue sky and the Vistula through a chink in the wall. The street runs downhill. And that barricade was considered both a lookout and a front. Often, partisans were lying on it and firing at Wybrzeże and Praga. Perhaps even at those legendary trees with the Germans and their binoculars. On the other side of Mostowa (there were buildings there then) you hurried through the

gate of the lower courtyard of the Gdańsk Cellar. Or perhaps that wasn't the Gdańsk Cellar but only its vicinity. Somewhat lower down. It seems to me that the oldest hospital in Warsaw, St. Lazarus (I remember its burnt-out walls were still standing, adhering to the ancient ramparts, when it was uncovered after the war; they dismantled the monument), stood, I think, directly opposite the entrance from Mostowa near that first lower courtyard. If there really were two courtyards there. And behind the hoardings, or the wall, at least behind the wide-open wooden gate, it seems there was a second courtyard. Also with cobblestones. And that was the one that housed the Gdańsk Cellar. The Gdańsk Cellar has always been a famous building. My grandmother lived in it. My father spent entire months there as a child around 1905. The Gdańsk Cellar stood four stories above that courtyard with its cobblestones and gray cats always sitting on them, or, rather, it was four stories counting from below or two above the upper level, which faced Freta Street, or the front. The stairs were wooden. Also with cats on them. I remember that from before the war. Only at that time no one knew either about the landmark value of St. Lazarus (which had been reconstructed, after all, built onto, renovated, like the majority of such buildings in Warsaw, so that it was difficult to see it as a monument), nor did anyone know that the Gdańsk Cellar, in addition to its elaborate construction, was a parasite on the remains of the barbican. So you rushed into a stairwell. Up to the third floor. And after racing through the passageway you realized that it was the ground floor on Freta Street. Then came the gate and then, right away, the street. The hill of Stare Miasto. On this route, in the Gdańsk Cellar and its exit onto Freta, at the intersection of Długa, Nowomiejska, and Mostowa Streets, people were always passing by quickly, in crowds. They would walk past once or twice. Searching. Taking care of things. And they would rush on. Długa was always the most central and important street.

One of the buildings, either the Gdańsk Cellar or the one housing the baths near Mostowa, had a façade decorated with graying cream-colored tiles, which were fashionable in the nineteenth century. Come to think of it, there were somewhat similar tiles on the cathedral on Kościelna Street. The colors of the apartment houses, however, were already beginning to turn scorched gray. A corner of Mostowa and Freta was in ruins. Perhaps even two corners. I know for certain, from recent testimony, that the first bomb demolished the building to the right of Mostowa — as one stands facing the Vistula; and yet to this day I see it as the left corner. The one with the shops. A pile of red bricks. After all, those weren't the only ruins here. But still, all that was just the beginning. True, perhaps it was then that the people in

the cellar near Stary Rynek were suffocated to death by flour when the bomb fell. But the churches, convents, and the cathedral were still standing. Never has Warsaw — although it is four times larger now than it was then — seemed so large and complicated, so endless. Distances were extended. Layouts and divisions were multiplied, peeled away, excavated, overlapped into a fine network. Today I am moved by the thought that I was at the confluence of Krucza — Piękna — Mokotowska while those others were shooting from Polytechnic Square — and that it seemed and felt distant. Certainly one could see neither the guns nor them. Involuntarily, one transposed the entire topography of the front. The Praga shore seemed to be located on some other map. The Hitlerites with their binoculars in the zoo's tall trees and the eastern front in Żerań were a myth — something that revealed itself, it is true, but only as a second or third reality. Which means, however — because this is probably the main cause — psychic compartments and distances. After all, the same thing happened in the Jewish uprising.

We rushed into the hospitals. All on the left side. There were a lot of them. I think there was still some clattering on the ground floors. But since it was dangerous (Miodowa was already quite shot up) the hospitals were in the basements. And since the basements were merely shelters, and since shelters beneath old houses were ordinary cellars for coal and potatoes with narrow cubicles and stalls, it is not surprising that even after all our experiences we were floored once again. Astounded. Signs were posted along the narrow corridors over the entryways to the potato stalls: Ward 5, Ward 6. And in the corridor itself, the one leading from the courtyard entrance, lay the wounded. That, too, was a ward number something. Some lay on the cellar floor. On what? On whatever blankets were available. On scraps of paper, too. And also under packaging paper. Others were sitting. They half sat up. There were yet others, swathed in bandages, with faces burned the color of a wardrobe, covered with strips of gauze bandages. Their arms, too. And they were so held together by these bandages that they looked as if they were propped up on it (on something). They were walking back and forth. Like totem poles. They kept passing by. Returning. Because it was crowded. They were practically marching in place. And holding their bandaged arms up — both of them — symmetrically (that's where "totem poles" comes from). Their mouths were open. They were breathing. They were walking about out of dreadful impatience. Because they couldn't stay still. Because of being burned alive and still living— alive but not living. They were the airmen. From the plane. The ones who had crashed onto the barricade with the tram at the outlet of Miodowa Street. We asked them a few questions. Nothing much. They nodded at

some things. But it wasn't really a conversation. They were walking. That's all. With those raised arms. With their breathing. With a slit for nose and mouth in the bandages on their faces. The tram driver wasn't here, either. So our chances were dwindling. The tram driver's girlfriend was crying. I think all three of us went home. After a while. Why not?

I have already mentioned the small cellar near the entrance to the stairwell where there was a stove on which the women did the cooking. There were always several pots on the stove, close together, so that they could barely fit. There were quarrels because of this, and even that incident with the axes. Once two neighbors quarreled over whose turn it was. One of them was offended and went to her own apartment to cook. Upstairs, that is. Right afterward, a shell landed and she was hit by shrapnel. I was near the stairs when they brought her down. There was a commotion. Someone cried out, "A stretcher!"

And already she was on a stretcher. I don't know if I helped, too. But I did become one of the stretcher-bearers right afterward. At the feet, I think. She'd caught the shrapnel in her heel. And I remember that the blood just came pouring out. They didn't bandage her, probably because there wasn't anything to do it with, and anyway, the hospital was nearby. On Prochownia.

Her children ran downstairs after us, howling. She was groaning. We reached the courtyard quickly. It was a bright day. Hot. Shells were falling. we ran into the street at a trot, carrying the stretcher. Rybaki was like a pot. Boom! Boom! The narrow passage near our barricade: we had to take the stretcher with that woman and with her foot pouring blood sort of at a tilt and squeeze through. Farther on, the driveway. The wall. Shells were striking the wall and those two niches. Whatever we passed went boom! And so it went until the corner. Until Prochownia.

There we set down the stretcher. In the middle — on the ground floor (I don't know, was there room in the cellar?). I remember the gray light and the mood just like in Amicis or Saragossa in Żeromski's novel *Ashes*. A single crowd, misery, and grayness.

"Just a moment, citizen." I think that is how I was addressed. "We just have to transfer from a bed" (bed?) "onto" (onto something or other) "a wounded lieutenant who's missing both his legs."

"Very good." I wait, in shock. But no. They let me go after a few minutes.

"It's not necessary. There's someone else by now."

They kept on pounding. Onto that pot. Up and down Rybaki Street. I go home. They kept pounding. Oh, mother, how they were pounding! But I made it. In one piece.

However, the stove (or perhaps there was more than one, I don't

remember) was not so crowded at times. Because Swen's mother used to set her pot on it. Meaning, food for all of us. Or sometimes Swen and I cooked pancakes on the stovetop. From dark flour.

People were eating twice a day then. So it wasn't too bad. At times one might get something from the general allotment, too. But one day panic erupted: "We've lost the storehouses on Stawki!"

It was from just such a storehouse on Stawki that we once got potato flakes. Generally speaking, we didn't even dream about potatoes. Throughout the entire uprising. So that was an exceptional occasion.

Another day Swen confided in me that his mother had confided in him that there was no longer very much flour left. In addition to what flour she still had there were also some rusks that Swen's mother, with her marvelous foresight, had managed to dry. But that "not much," for six people, wasn't very much at all. There was also ersatz coffee. But that was only something to drink. Of course, it wasn't sweetened — not even with saccharine.

So? What to advise? Something had to be done. And a way out was found. Once, as we were walking away from the altar, a kind little woman who "lived" near the pillar on the other side of our shelter beckoned to us.

"If you would be so brave as to go upstairs to my apartment for flour, because I have some up there but I'm afraid to go, you could bring me a little and take as much as you want for yourselves…"

We'd had courage on the first or the second day. It wasn't August 7 or 8. We had gone upstairs once, I don't remember if it was at the very beginning or a little later, but anyway it was during the days when there were still some peaceful moments. We went secretly. To the third floor. Why? For rusks, I think. There must have been some important reason. There was still a door then. Because I remember opening, going inside. And the couch. A green one. We used to sit on that couch staring out the window at the Vistula day and night. We had held our literary circle meetings here with Teik, Halina, Irena, and Zym. Once I'd even written a story about us on that couch. And I had described it as "threadbare." For some reason Swen held that against me. Later, he laughed about it.

I had gone to Swen's for the first time one night and naturally, like most people coming to see a friend or even paying a visit, I'd slept over. I was sitting on the windowsill. Looking at the Vistula out of the corner of my eye. I was telling Swen about something. At one point Swen opened up the couch, propped the seat against the back, and, squatting and stooped over, searched in it for something for a long time. I was surprised that he was so distracted. But later he explained to me that he'd been looking for a nightshirt for me and that it was a

problem for him. Now the scene was being repeated. Right now. Swen squatted in front of the opened couch and hunted for something in it. I was standing near the door (the window was dangerous) and didn't see what he was looking for. (We'd already found the rusks, if that's why we were up there.) Swen dug out some spoons, I think. I'm not sure. He told me later, so I found out what it was. But I don't remember.

Presumably on the third day, after a second prodding from the woman near the pillar, Swen and I persuaded each other and went upstairs. We were terrified. Perhaps there was a shelling, but onward. I think on our way we stopped first to look at Swen's apartment. The situation had changed drastically. There was no question of opening the door. There was no door. The hall and the apartment were no longer divided. There wasn't even a wall. Everything was all jumbled together and perforated by the shells. I glanced in the direction of the couch. A piece of it could be seen. Completely crushed by a piece of wall. We raced to the woman's apartment. We grabbed the flour quick as lightning. As much as we could. And ran as quick as could be downstairs!

I was happy that the specter of hunger was staved off. For Swen's mother, Swen, me, Aunt Uff., Zbyszek, and Celinka. It was a question of honor, too. I had stopped being a parasite.

I'm having problems again with the sequence of facts between August 12 and 18. I know that for my readers it's not important exactly what happened when. But they shouldn't be surprised. For me it's important — this precision of dates and places (as I think I have already indicated) is my way of holding on to the grand design. I have also realized that in spite of myself I may be carelessly tying together or losing my various distant, more distant, and sometimes not quite so distant personae. But that's how it was. People lost each other as suddenly as they found each other. They'd be close for quite some time. Then others became close. Suddenly these were lost and new people became important. That was common. A matter of herd instinct. It didn't make any difference what herd you belonged to, as long as you were in a herd. Everyone was always flitting about, as happens (in any case) at such hours of death, people couldn't find a place for themselves. The people from one cellar went to the one next door, and the people from next door went over to the first. Just as the people from lower Stare Miasto moved uphill and the people from above to the escarpment, downhill. Because anywhere else was better. And even if it occurred to someone that it was the same everywhere, that didn't help at all.

Let us return to the uprising. Of August. As we thought then. That it would be called the August Uprising forever. Throughout Poland.

But even as near as Młociny, or Włochy, Warsaw was not Poland; Poland lived her own life. For Poland, the most important thing about Warsaw was that it was burning. That made an impression. Roma Oliwowa's father near Siedlce climbed a tree, climbed down, and declared, "Oho, Warsaw is burning."

Pilots flying over at night to help out with airdrops for Warsaw had no difficulty taking aim. Where it was red, that was Warsaw.

So — getting back to Poland — Poland was not Warsaw. And the uprising remained the Warsaw Uprising. So let us return to the Warsaw Uprising. One day or evening… it's hard to say which… there were a lot of carbide lamps burning in the shelter, a few candles, there was plenty of carbide — everywhere — on Chłodna Street I saw people rolling down the sidewalk entire cans, these corrugated kegs rolling along the sidewalk with a grating sound and with that smell (of carbide) from under their arms. So it was hard to distinguish, and definitely not in memory, in that endless evening of the shelters, what was day and what was not… On one such seeming evening, suddenly, as happened now and again, people came in, as usual without anything, this time from Wola. Not straight from Wola but after having stopped along the way in other shelters, which had been bombed, no doubt, or which struck them as being worse than ours. We became friendly with a fat woman with heavy arms and legs (she was wearing only a flowered summer dress, with short sleeves) from Towarowa Street at the corner of Wolska. She'd escaped from there. In front of her eyes people had been stood up against a wall, mostly men of course, shot, set on fire. Like many others in this confusion, burning, screaming, and shouting, somehow or other she had fled. Our large brick shelter with the altar had already been jam-packed for many days. So she had nowhere to sleep. The bunks were filled to capacity. She found herself a loose door, one with louvered panels, perhaps from a cellar toilet, and somewhere near us, several bunks beyond the Ads., closer to the altar and right next to the entrance, she spent the first night on the door (laid flat) and when she awoke her fat arms and thighs were completely covered with furrows from the slats.

There was a crush. There was less and less space. Also, fewer buildings. Little by little, the territory of our Stare Miasto redoubt began to shrink; at times the barricades and trenches were moved back. Because the trenches were ordinary ones. Ditches. For running and shooting. Stretched out. Winding. As at the front.

Also — there were more and more bombardments. Artillery, the gunboat on the Vistula, the armored train on the peripheral railway tracks; in short, all sorts of shells. So it went. But the planes. The dread. Daily. And the days were long. The planes would fly over. Or, rather, they would descend over the roofs. And then, when you could

already hear that they were there… drrrr… that they were diving over our roofs, the roofs of our housing blocks or the buildings close by, then you knew that there were bombs, too. And immediately the whining of the bombs would separate from the nosedive of the planes; you waited a moment, just an instant. That moment was the actual hit. After it came a thud or, rather, an explosion. And after that — a smashing, crashing, shattering of something, the results of the hit. Thanks to some sort of luck, there were an awful lot of duds. People said that was the Czechs' doing. That the bombs were manufactured over there and they purposely didn't assemble them properly. Well, as soon as that whine separated from an airplane, the bomb falling, the direct hit, and the silence, we began to count, silently in the first days, then Swen and I together, then aloud in a family chorus: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven… twelve…"—here we already exchanged glances—"thir-teen…" and a wave of the hand, disbelief, dismissal, a sigh: "A dud."

But soon the airplanes flew over again, dived down, the separation of the bombs, the whining, the silence, and—"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven…"—and at this point sometimes it suddenly succeeded — boom!

Mostly they exploded at eight or nine. Yes. But the planes would be flying over once more and: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven…"

Crash!

Us? No… And already that whine.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine…"

Crash!

No, next door it seems; no, because we're still here. There was no other proof. And already they're flying, whining…

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten…"

Crash!

But already the next one.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, e-lev-en… tweeelve… thir-teeen…"

"Oh…"

Then suddenly there might be a lull. Half an hour. An hour. And: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten…"

Hisss… and immediately: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve… thir-teeen… oh…"

And already new ones diving…

"One, two, three, four, five, six… God help us!…"

And a little while later…

"Oh, they're here already…"

"Oh Jesus…"

And: “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twe-elve… thir-teeen… oh!”

That was daytime. And at night. We’re lying there. In a crowd. A flood. By the cellarful. And suddenly: crash… crash… crash… crash… crash… crash…

Windblasts, fire, and the buckling of walls — six times each, usually.

But how those walls moved… Once, I’m watching them — and it seems they’re moving a meter back and forth… and back… and forth… are we breaking into pieces?!… No-o… they’re swinging… a little less, less and less, and they settle down… as they were before. I rubbed my eyes in amazement.

After every such “wardrobe,” for a moment people went “buzz, buzz, buzz…” and immediately lay down to sleep again, wherever they were, and fell asleep instantly.

And again: “whoossh… whoossh… whoossh…” Fires, windblasts, flying walls (red), people with children in their arms hurling themselves en masse in the direction of the water barrel, into the narrow passageway leading to the distant cellars, and people from the distant cellars rushing into our shelter.

Everyone at the same time.

They collide, knock into each other. They come back. The “wardrobe” quiets down. They rush to the bunks. They sleep. Until once again. An hour later. Two. Half an hour: whoossh… whoossh…

And once again with their children in their arms, off to the passageway, the others toward us, collision, quiet, exhaustion, just as they’re standing there, in suits, in coats… with children, snoring…

No. From August 12 on, the nights were not good. I shall pass over the shells. The tanks. The stealthy approaches. It was the “wardrobes.”

An expedition… for flour. We had done it once before. Successfully. We had given some to the woman. She had some. And we had some. But all of a sudden Swen had the bright idea that for — how many of us were there? — he, Mama, Celinka, Aunt Uff., Zbyszek, and I — six! Well then, for six people twice a day, or even once a day, and even taking into account the rest of the rusks (we still had some), there wasn’t so very much flour left. So he said, “Let’s go upstairs.”

I followed him. The first time had been bad enough. Something had struck. Our block. In that section. But somehow or other. I’d kept myself under control. But now, less so. On the second floor I scream at Swen, “We’re going back!”

He: “No!”

Suddenly a crash. A shell in the wall beside us.

Swen races higher.

I scream: “Let’s go back! Swen! Swen!”

He says nothing.

I scream (the shells are hitting) and already I’m leaving: “I’m going down! Don’t go!”

It didn’t help. The shells were striking the stairs. Ours. I fled. I was a coward. Swen returned after a moment panting and smiling and with new flour.

I was even more impressed since Swen had a bandaged knee; there was something wrong with his knee and (because it was like that from the beginning) he hadn’t joined any of the fighting. Other men, without naming a reason, without explanations, crouched down, practically cowered together behind the barrel, behind the pillars, under the plank beds. And didn’t join.

But there were entire groups who did go. To every summons. To the wounded. To excavations. To the barricades. Relocations. Fortifications. Ditches. Firefighting. Etc.

I have already told of Swen’s suggestions for improvement, which he’d announced at the altar, and how everyone in the shelter smote his breast and repeated, “We swear.” It wasn’t always successful, but there would be breast-beating once more, reconciliations, and requests for forgiveness.

Once, when our entire red shelter was still snoring away and only the thin little candles were sputtering, suddenly on the left side near the wall with the pillars an argument erupted.

“What’s the matter with you, lady, are you nuts?”

Because someone had a child and someone else either took the chamber pot from the child and sprinkled chlorine from it along the passageway between the left side of the shelter and the left wall… or else it was about the chamber pot, but without any chlorine, and the image of someone walking about and sprinkling something just came to me. I think it really was chlorine, and I think it was about the sharp odor… it doesn’t matter.

Or else it was about the barrel. The one not so far from us, near the exit corridor.

“It stinks. What’s that? Change it!”

“Ooh… so what… who gives a damn!”

Finally there came a moment when a decision was made about the barrel. It was already stinking halfway across the shelter.

“Change it.”

“Change it, change it.”

“But how? Who?”

“With a bucket brigade.”

“Yes, yes.”

“A bucket brigade! Please, everyone, line up and we will pass each other the filthy water… one to another… and so on and on…”

Just like the bricks on Chłodna for the barricades.

And it worked. To the bottom. First that old water. Then new. First through the little corridor to the toilets (a stream of people). Then back through the little corridor to the barrel. We passed it along. From person to person. Poured it out. Poured it in. Changed it.

The days didn’t differ from one another so very much. But that one holiday — August 15 (it fell on a Tuesday) — we suddenly decided to observe, to celebrate. Defiantly. From early morning.

That church holiday (now abolished) was at the same time the anniversary of the so-called “miracle at the Vistula.”[12] Which had never taken place. Other than the metaphor, nothing had happened. But in the course of time the metaphor was realized. That was about prewar days. This time people were also waiting for a miracle at the Vistula. Also involving them. On the other bank. And beyond Żerań. If only they’ll come.

“If only they’ll cross the border.”

“If only they’ll come.”

“If only they were here already.”

People listened to the front. Patted the ground. They were advancing. Sometimes they stopped.

Waiting for the Russians was not exactly in line with the policy of the Home Army. Which in its own way was also waiting. And also waiting, as it were, for salvation. So this waiting even with this policy of mutual misunderstanding (still ongoing then) was also a kind of harmony. A human kind.

“The fifteenth day of the uprising,” people said on the morning of August 15.

“The fifteenth day…”

“The fifteenth day.”

It seems to me that I have placed certain facts before that date, the rampaging of hell. But I recall that August 15 was already after many horrors — here — in Starówka. That morning, I don’t remember how it began, obviously it was hot, smoky, something was on fire there, which means there was a lot of smoke and live flames… Well, that early morning, or rather all morning, there were a few hours of rest, peace, festivity after entire cataclysms.

A High Mass was supposed to be celebrated in the great hall with the pillars with the participation of five hundred (I think) partisans who were already quartered with us, and the entire population of blocks A, B, C, and D. Candles and dishes were prepared; from somewhere or other a carpet, I think, perhaps even something else for decoration — what? I don’t remember. I remember that we had begun

to assemble. That it was hot, peaceful. That there was a crowd of civilians and a crowd of partisans in their German jumpsuits, pieces of uniforms, with rifles and helmets in their hands, taken from the Hitlerites. That the crowd was really enormous, that the candles were lit, that the priest entered in a green or maybe a white chasuble. And the Mass began.

No one took into consideration the possibility of a commotion, of the disruption of our plans. Nor had anyone shaved for two weeks. The heat intensified, the Mass continued. The people stood there. Peace. On and on. At the end the priest began singing almost at the same time as the partisans and the crowd: “God, Thou who encompassed Poland…”

It was sung to the end. People went their separate ways. Everyone. To their cellars. The troops to their quarters. Or rather to their positions on the ground floor, in the windows, at the exit, at the barricades, and the rest with the civilians to the shelters. And it was then, I think, that the planes flew over. They dived down onto our roofs. And started dropping bomb after bomb. I think we didn’t even keep count then. There were so many of them at one time. All aimed at our block. The people knew that the Germans knew that a large number of partisans were here. But so what? Should they be angry? (Sometimes civilians were angry at the military and vice versa, but not that day.) I don’t know if it was then that someone fired a rifle (sometimes people did that) at the pilots. And hit one. The plane fell. But the bomb also fell on us. On our cellar. Boom. Darkness. Jolt. And — it’s amazing, but we’re standing, thrown together, just as we were before. So not on us? Then there were the tanks. An attack. They pounded us. Then artillery. And — after a couple of hours — in the sunshine and the heat — as soon as Swen and I dragged ourselves out into the courtyard we noticed that there was a hole behind the wall of our shelter and that people were digging out something white. And not just one thing. We all knew that if instead of a house or cellar — there’s a hole (open) and people are digging out something white and something else in white is lying there, then a lot of people have perished. Well, they’d penetrated the cellars. Of our closest neighbors. But we hadn’t caught it.

From that day the ongoing hell of Starówka continued uninterrupted. And, it seems, day and night, also without a break, the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament were burning. All their buildings by turns, those on the escarpment and those above the escarpment.

“The Sisters of the Holy Sacrament are burning,” people now repeated daily from that day on.

Yes, the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament were burning. And rushing about in their veils. White. And slaughtering pigs and cows. Daily.

And distributing them to people. And also receiving and caring for people. Larger and larger hordes. Thousands. Those Sisters of the Holy Sacrament who for hundreds of years, since their founding by Marysieńka, had sung behind gratings and taken Communion through gratings, suddenly became activists, social workers, a heroic institution, the support of Nowe Miasto. They provisioned part of the troops, too. The troops distributed some of theirs to civilians. Only, the same error was committed every day in a vicious circle. It was hot. And they didn't distribute the meat from the pigs and cows that had just been butchered but only those slaughtered yesterday or the day before yesterday. And the ones from yesterday or the day before were already putrid. And when the troops cooked it (because the troops did cook it), in the central shelters, in cauldrons, the stench pervaded the entire cellar. Once we even tried to eat it. But neither Swen nor I could touch it. It stank unbearably. Although we were already very hungry.

In this stench I remember the partisans lying side by side under shared blankets with girl couriers and nurses after a nighttime action. Some of the women were offended, but only slightly, by the whispering and ogling. I think mainly they were surprised. That in such a situation a person could think about something like that. The rest were ideally indifferent.

In general, relations with the partisans were good. Although I remember one painful scene on Freta Street in front of the Dominicans. Some women were cursing out some partisans who happened to be passing by. Because of what they had done. In another place (but this is only hearsay) partisans cursed some women. Because when the Germans announced that people could come out with white cloths or kerchiefs and surrender on the Żoliborz viaduct, several women set out. Information about this incident varies. At any rate there was probably more than one such surrender. Or, rather, attempt. One, it seems, was lucky (for those women with the white kerchiefs). Another time, it seems, the Germans shot at them. And maybe it was then that the women retreated in horror. To the nearest building. The partisans slammed the door in their faces, disgusted. Then, it seems, they cursed them but finally let them in. But some of the women were offended in turn. And went to another building.

The business of the key to our apartment (mine, Mother's, and Stefa's) at 4 ˚Chłodna Street kept haunting me. How could they have gone home — how surrender to the Germans — if they had no keys? And in general, how was Mother getting along? And Aunt Józia and Stefa? I had the keys with me. But perhaps Granny Frania and Aunt Limpcia (my mother's aunt and her daughter) knew something? They

lived at 16 Bielańska Street in the basement of an annex behind the Radziwiłł Palace. In their courtyard. With their whole family. They were surely there. So what prevents me from seeing them? Perhaps I'll manage to make my way farther along Leszno to Żelazna? Anyway, they're saying that Leszno Street is in our hands — continuously. That you can walk for a kilometer along Leszno through cellars connected by breaks in the walls. In any case — at least to set out. And I did set out. Swen didn't want to.

And Swen's mother said, "Don't go."

But I insisted.

I started walking.

Rybaki Street. The familiar Staromiejski route. From the slope to the garbage bin, into the hole in the wall. The small courtyard. A leap up to the balcony. Someone's apartment. A courtyard. Running across a long plank into the window of someone's apartment. People are sitting there. Women. People. A hole. Crawling through into the darkness among people lying there.

"Oh, Jesus…" That was the wounded.

From the cellar into the courtyard, the gate, a leap, across Mostowa, barricades, with partisans lying prone, firing their machine guns at Praga. An open wooden gate. The cobblestone courtyard. Dark brown. Big. Below, the Gdańsk Cellar. The House at the Sign of the Cats. Here — the second floor. There — the ground floor. Freta. And Długa. Almost straight ahead… I scurried across Długa. It wasn't as bad as it might have been. Perhaps something was burning. It was then that I looked at that barricade at the end of Miodowa Street. With the trolley and the airplane. And I raced into Długa Street. Onto its more distant, crooked, serpentine, uneven path. There was a barricade every so often. And it was somewhat dangerous. People warned me. Because at the intersection of Długa and Przejazd, across from the Arsenal, famous for the outbreak of the November uprising, [13] stood an eight-story building occupied by the Hitlerites. They had the whole neighborhood under fire. Długa Street in particular. In front of the Arsenal, on the right of Długa Street, was the intersection with Nalewki, and on the left, almost directly opposite, the end of Bielańska Street. In front of this intersection — a barricade. You ran along the right side coming from the Vistula, because it was safer (more cover). And you ran straight across Długa behind the barricade. You raced through a gate and into the courtyard of a building that almost bordered on or directly bordered on 16 Bielańska. Where Aunt Limpcia lived, or rather Olimpcia, or Olimpia. With her husband, Stach, with Ryszek (my cousin), her brother Ceniek, and my granny Frania, her mother, that is, who called her Olemka. I reached their courtyard through the passageway from Długa. A strange, long yard.

Paved with cobblestones. Stretching from the side of Bielańska (right after Tlomackie) and the side of the Radziwiłł Palace (the one which stands today on the center strip of the east-west artery); winding between the picket-fence entrance gate and the apartment house at the front, 16 Bielańska, and the front of the palace, with its circular driveway and three pillars; farther on, the courtyard twisted again, went around the palace from the other side, and opposite it there was a long annex. At the end of this building, just beneath the garden wall at the rear of the palace, right there — I walked quickly, I think I flew, flew up to it and looked into their window. “Aunt!” I yelled, “Aunt Limpcia! Rysiek!”

Aunt Limpcia was preparing soup (barley soup), Rysiek ran out onto the stairs, I think Limpcia’s husband was there, too, in an instant, my uncle, poor Stach, also Stach’s brother Józiek was definitely there. They called to me. I ran down. To them. (They didn’t need any other shelter.)

“And Granny Frania?” I asked.

“Oh,” Aunt Limpcia was stirring the thick barley soup, she was unperturbed. “Granny’s in the palace… in the corridor. It’s crowded there, they have light… Why don’t you go over and see her, oh, when she sees you…”

“And my mother, do you know anything? She stayed on Chłodna. I have the keys. I want to get through to Chłodna.”

“We don’t know a thing. How do you plan to go?”

“Well, I could try Leszno.”

“Oh… don’t even mention it. How? You won’t get through. What do you think? That you’ll get far? To Żelazna? And that there aren’t any Germans at 4 ˚Chłodna?”

“Well, yes…” I agreed.

“Go along with Rysiek to Granny, he’ll take you there, and I’ll finish cooking the barley soup meanwhile. Do you want some? You’ll get a big helping.”

“Yes, I do…”

“Then go, but Granny will burst out crying…”

We walk over to the palace. We go inside. Across the driveway. Into wide, semicircular, rococo corridors, formerly ballrooms, which lead this way and that; now the light of electric bulbs sparkling here… and people, people. And talking, noise, buzz… buzz… and garbage up to the ceiling. Along both sides — one heap of garbage piled beside another — and people, on it, under it, lower down, sitting, lying, talking… a bend in the corridor and another bend… and so we walk on, bend after bend.

Until finally Rysiek points: “There!”

I look — she’s sitting there.

Sitting there. Granny Frania.

“Granny! Granny!”

She turns around on her stool, looks with red eyes. Grabs me around the neck, kisses, and bursts out crying.

“How’s your mother, how are you, Lord have mercy, how worried I’ve been about you. How is Kazia?”

I tell her (Kazia’s my mother).

We sat there for a while. Then we went back. I got some soup. Thick. Splendid. Lots of barley. Full. A huge, full bowl. I devoured it.

“Would you like some more?”

“Please.”

I got a second helping. Just the same. What happiness I felt then with those bowls — until I was full. I sat awhile. I had to go back. But just then a nasty fusillade got started against Długa. From that eight-story building on Przejazd.

“How can you go home? How will you get through?”

“Under the barricade.”

It seemed to be getting worse by the minute. I run outside. At the Długa gate, right at the entryway near the barricade — I see that one after the other people get set! bend down, dash across. For a minute I screw up my courage. But I see: a girl courier — she runs — and nothing happens to her so I snap to! duck down, dash across — yes, just like that. And already I am racing along the other side of Długa. Farther, farther. Near the smoldering ruins. Past the Four Winds. At last I pass the curve and the bend. Where you can already see Krasiński Square farther along — on Długa. All the way as far as the Dominicans, too, with the tower and the wardrobe. Gothic. Pseudo. Because that’s how I perceived the annex with the porch (like a wardrobe) at that time. From the front. It no longer exists. There on the left is a narrow street — after that bend in Długa — a little, dead-end alley at the rear of the Krasiński Gardens. It was called Baroque Street. Formally. Before the war. A neighborhood proud of any novelty. But people understood it to be “Barrack Street” (that’s what they said). (I confess that until 1946 I, too, thought it was Barrack Street.)

All of a sudden — bombers. Already they’re hovering over the rooftops, raining down bombs. Now they’re gone. Now they’re back. Farther away. Closer. Now they’re flying into Baroque Street. We are, too. They’re flying blindly. We are, too. We is I. And someone else. Like me. We. Two of us. Here. Only. Neither here nor there. Because now. They’re here! We run. Into some kind of two-story what (?)… empty, it flies, we fly (along?) the downstairs, rooms (?), by way of something (?), halls (?), it’s already changing, howling, clanging, we’re flying, bricks are flying, the bombers are making a mess. The

proverbial brick. Just one. But here there are so many: pow! pow! We raise our collars. What kind of stupid instinct?! We jump. Pow! pow! Just not to surrender. To chance. Everything's important. Because he's flying in zigzags. In spurts. Between the walls. Ssssh… booom. Falling plaster. Whitewash. Something. From the rain gutters. Wait? No. Just don't stay still. Sssshh. That hill is flying, we can sit down… We jump for a while and suddenly pow! pow! Nothing. Dodges. Only… As was necessary, in my opinion.

(From Leszno. 1930. Toy blocks. Nanka is peeling potatoes. I'm wondering how a bullet can hit; after all I'd notice it and jump back. Nanka replies that it won't work. Now something of the sort has worked.)

After the air raid. The other guy goes his way. I go mine. At a run. Długa. The square. Długa. Mostowa. Downhill. The passageway. Below. Rybaki. Cobblestones. Our place. Or rather — oh! he's here! — Swen, eyes red. He grabs me. Swen's mother says, "What hasn't he imagined — all this time — that you'd never return, that something had happened."

"Eh." I gesture dismissively.

That's what I'd wanted. And that's also how I overlooked it. It wasn't all that important. Or so it seems. But for me… And for the Radziwiłł Palace. It was. Important. And for that wall. With the garden. Just as it is now. In the first place, because it's at the rear of the palace (behind the east-west artery, where it descends into the underpass); in the second place, because of its dimensions. Definitely. And such a lawn. And those statues. It's obvious, of course, that today there is no wall; the whole joke, in fact, is that there is no wall, but instead there are trams on either side and the wall is in the center. Those statues, in particular. There was peace, an interlude. Silence. Roughly speaking, at least. Anyway, right here. And in the meantime Aunt Limpcia was cooking barley soup. In fact, as it turned out later, it was pea soup. Rysiek reminded me after the war (but the steam rose from the window, from below; and it smelled so good — she had something to cook with). Rysiek and I. Went into that garden. It used not to be open. Fine weather, hot. Of course, it was daytime. That sky. Heat — blue. The grass — green. And they. Those statues. Because I remember that they weren't there after the war; then they were; then they were off their pedestals and just stood there on the grass, stood there, on the grass, in the grass. Then — on pedestals again, it seems, and now? — I'm confused — about how they stand. But how were they standing then? Also. Seemingly on pedestals. No, not really. Without them. All of them? How should I know? Yet dust was rising from something. Something was giving off dust (then). They were

shooting. Yes. That's it. Now I know. At the Bank of Poland. The one on the banknotes. From before the war. Next door. So it had begun. Slyly. Once. Twice. Echo. Ping. A miss. Sometimes it was just the same as that time with the boards. Something toppled too, I think. From among that group of statues. And that's all.

During the occupation Polish children, Jewish children, old ladies, old men, Gypsies, madmen (so-called) — in general, all kinds of people, singly or in groups, came into our courtyard on Chłodna Street from morning to night and sang. Most often:

On the first day of September
In that famous year
The enemy struck at Poland
From sky so high and clear.
He hammered at our Warsaw
Most viciously of all.
Oh, Warsaw, poor Warsaw,
Bloody city that you are.
Once you were so splendid,
Majestic and so lovely.
Now all that remains of you
Is a heap of rubble.

That is how it seemed after 1939, after that September. When one day — the twenty-third, I think — eighteen thousand shells fell on Warsaw. September 25—well, that was the decisive day — from morning to night, for twelve hours, bombing of all of Warsaw. On the next day it was set ablaze. There were fires. Raging. Shells. But it was already a foregone conclusion. Negotiations. On September 25 people could no longer hold out. On the twenty-seventh those who had survived crawled out from the cellars.

Yes. Afterward. Afterward — the deportations. Pawiak Prison. Not like the camps that first week. It was developing. Then the ghetto began. And that wall on Krasiński Square, on Holy Tuesday — April 20—the second day of the uprising in the ghetto. A German was shooting from the garrison on Miodowa, from a tank, into the ghetto, into Bonifraterska Street. People were dropping over there. From large, blank walls with tiny windows. From the windows, too. And people gathered there — hooligans — and they applauded that German. And after who knows how many hits he took off his helmet, because it was sunny, he was sweating, he was tired out — the hero — in this little crowd of well-wishers — and he wiped away his sweat.

And then — it was that famous, late, beautiful Easter of 1943. The Aryans — we were still called that — in the churches — festive — and over there — that hell — known, but without hope. And without

a witness. Yes, there were those who helped. There were well-wishers. Or — the indifferent. But… let's drop it. Easter Sunday was the climax of the conflagration. In the sky — fire.

That began to make a bit of an impression on people. On some at least. But there was a carnival on Krasiński Square. Carousels. Chair-o-planes. The Germans got it going with great gusto. Well, some members of our little public were whirling around on those swings and wheels — fifty, sixty, a hundred times in a row. In that thick smoke. Blowing in. And blowing in. From Bonifraterska. And from Nowolipki. From Dzielna. Świętojerska. Przejazd. The uprising in the ghetto went on and on. The first swallows. I noticed them in May that year, in that smoke, and I heard their twittering. Around the tenth, I remember. That was already two days after the collective suicide of the Jewish general staff. In a bunker on Miła. The Germans discovered them.

As for those chair-o-planes, I heard that there were people who specially swung on them in order to watch what was happening in the ghetto.

Now we were the ones who were cut off, not admired. But at least we had the hope of the front. The Germans were defeated. Formally. In the west, the offensive had been going on since June. And for a longer time in the east. But the partisans had badly miscalculated the Germans' strength. On the other side of the Vistula. They had thought before the outbreak of the uprising that only a remnant remained. But it turned out that several divisions (nine?) remained. Yes. And it was of no use at all that they were losing. Here they were strong.

August first, a bloody day,
The people of Warsaw arose
……
…… for
Germans were already at every door,
Dadada dada da…

I can't remember the words. I'm thinking of that song about the uprising, naive, but… Later it went like this:

Such despair unfolds in one's heart,
There is nothing with which to fight.
A girl hurls a bottle at a tank
To pay them back
For the destroyed, razed capital,
For…

Again, the question of the front. We still had hope. But there were already those cutoff places, partitions: into Żoliborz, Mokotów, Powiśle, Śródmieście, Stare Miasto.

Bugaj Street runs from the bridge beneath the castle, below Stare

Miasto, to Mostowa Street. Rybaki Street runs from Mostowa all the way to the Mint (Mennica or Wytwórnia), that is, to Sanguszko.

The challenge was to hold the Mint. (Teik was there. And there were pitched battles there for entire days and nights for every room, every hallway.) And for the depot on Sierakowska Street, near the Gdańsk Station. In order to break through across the viaduct, the railroad track, to Żoliborz. The attacks were coordinated from two positions (Żoliborz and Starówka).

It didn't help. We lost "no-man's-land," the ghetto. We lost the depot, one piece of Muranów after another. The Mint was still being defended. That was the most famous stronghold in our Stare Miasto redoubt.

Yes. Something else about this endurance. This obstinacy. Why mince words: it was forced on us. It was supposedly well-known that the Hitlerites were over there, on the other side of the Vistula, the Russians close by, the partisans here, and over there in the west the Americans, the English. The Allies. But it was all simply a wound-up machine, set racing into unconsciousness. Those fronts. And this uprising. Here. What was there to appeal to? That big tin can on Wybrzeże, on the viaduct, with its tangle of barbed wire? That abstraction? Because it was just a tin can and an abstraction. Farther along — we all know it — the skull insignia, the helmets—*Raus! Raus!* — the shouts, the yelling. The Hitlerites, the terror, we were afraid that they might leap out of one of those tanks, attack us, start hurling grenades into the cellars. Because that's how it was. Everywhere. I always imagined those rumblings, the stamping feet, the shouts of "*Raus*," "*Hände hoch*," and crash! — a grenade, a string of them, into an entryway. A flash. Sparks. Crash! And that it might hit something. Or perhaps a pillar would act as a shield. We were especially afraid during our walks through those shelters, from one to the other, that we might suddenly see on a wall the shadows of those big helmets, at a slant, enlarged.

So there was that dread, that terror. And one wanted neither their sudden appearance, nor an unknown way out of the situation, nor any contact. With *them*. They weren't seen, after all, people hadn't seen them. All the more terrifying an abstraction. But the viaduct. Because once again, it seems, they announced that people should surrender, and who knows how many women went out with white kerchiefs, but there was something wrong about that viaduct. Apparently with quite a few. The planes, the shells — these were the typical signs of the machine. When and where in this place — in addition — in this uproar, cauldron, trap — could one decide anything, about oneself? Surrender with what? to whom? how? which way? when?

Ludwik, weeping and laughing, tells the story of 1939, the

bombardment, the inferno, the crowds, he can't control himself any longer, even here amidst these bombs:

weee-oooo

weee-oooooo

weee-oooooooo

Suddenly the women are bellowing, one of them, seated on her bundles, comes up with this: "Let's surrender!"

And the others follow: "Let's surrender!"

And the whole shelter repeats: "That's right! surrender!"

But here there is nothing, only:

wee-ooo

wee-ooooo

wee-ooooo

Then the women, the crowd, the shelter keep it up: "So, let's surrender!"

But nothing came of it.

Let us return to the uprising. An *Aktion*. Night. Freta Street. Saint Jacek's. Rather, the Dominicans. August 17. It is Saint Jacek's Day, exactly. And Saint Miron's, too. But in 1922 the calendar had Miron M.B. (Martyred Bishop) — because Nanka chose my name, Miron, from the calendar. But it was always the name day of Jacek and Julianna.

There was no Church of the Byzantine Saint Miron the Martyred Bishop (Jacek Odrowąż was Polish). On this day something moved me to go outside and trudge up the hill. There. As if. And I did. At the best possible moment. Perhaps it was then that those bullets were flying about Freta Street? Or maybe not then. I was collecting the swirling, loose pages of Titchener's *Psychology* from a demolished bookstore. The bullets were whizzing around my left ear, my right ear, and I bent down seventeen times, because that is how many double pages I collected. To read in the cellar. They came in handy. August 17—this I'm sure of — I entered the Church of Saint Jacek. I stood there. I looked around. It was empty. But already there were loud booms. From the shells. Churches, especially those large ones, are disastrous. Echoes resound in them. Like nowhere else. So there were booms and more booms. With echoes. But somehow it was too much. The echoes were already somewhere behind the wall. They were already landing right beside me. Now the church was shaking. Dust was swirling. Suddenly a splash; then it flared up, flew through the wall, into the center of the presbytery. So that a hole was blown right through the upper cornice, with the plaster of the shattered corbel sifting down. A dry taste in my mouth. I ran out. Why not? And then suddenly I could hear the winding up of the "wardrobe":

krra… krra… krra…

krra… krra… krra…
krra… krra… krra…

In an instant I'm in a doorway with a crowd. A man with a briefcase. The door to the drugstore. Now with the crowd, on the steps. Now it begins to hurl us, to whirl us. And since we dashed upstairs to the first floor instead of downstairs there was even more dread, more cowering; no one knew what the rocking and our being hurled about really was. The wardrobes had this peculiarity, that not only did they rip and snatch up to the height of four stories but they also stupefied.

So that's what my name day was like. Because I went home right after that. For boiled pasta. I think Swen's mother congratulated me, however. She used to grind out that pasta. Like all the women. The cellars. Without a break. Also little dumplings, or "rosary beads." The one or the other — in tiny pieces. A similar technique.

We did a lot of walking, I think. More than I remember. Not that everyone did. Swen walked less. Although he went on walks, too. But Mama, Aunt Uff., Zbyszek didn't take walks at all. Celinka, after that first day when she went to the district clinic on Miodowa, to that job (indeed!), no longer went out. Anywhere.

Well, thanks to our running about, Swen and I discovered a second route leading uphill. The Nowomiejski route. 23 Rybaki Street (the home of Leonard, the guy who wore eyeglasses and a coat, who had fled his shelter and come to ours because ours was made of poured concrete). From the front. To the outbuilding. Up to the third floor. Across the cobblestone courtyard. To the outbuilding directly opposite. Up to the third floor. There were five floors in all. Well, on the third floor you ran through the hall, as in the Gdańsk Cellar, and then you were on the ground floor on the escarpment. Somewhat like a yard, gardens. Also, hanging gardens (the back of the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament, but something else, too). (Furthermore, the appearance of trees and of constructed or, rather, demolished objects, of things that were covered with dust, had been changed and, moreover, kept on changing.) So — something hanging — because you ran across a bridge — over the ravines of the Nowe Miasto escarpment. And from the bridge to the erstwhile baroque Church of Saint Benon (now functioning once again), which was transformed under the tsars into Bieńkowski's knife factory. Inside I remember the feeling of a workshop and a church, and that we ran up to the gallery. Or the choir. That church-factory looked worse each time, more and more splintered, the little bricks thinner, drier, because of the dryness, everything in that splintering, burning, and heat was dry. And nothing could be extinguished because they didn't let that happen, because they were bombing repeatedly, setting fires again, without any aim,

over and over. Beyond Benon-Bieńkowski, already from above, from the Rynek of Nowe Miasto, I remember a dry, long, splintered, and always whiter (?) board, groaning underfoot. But finally you ran up to those iron bars, that forged-iron gate which is still in existence today and which closes off that same alley from behind the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament and up to Benon. Down this alley you at last ran out into the Nowe Miasto Rynek itself. At its widest spot. Or, rather, to the right of it. Behind the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament to the branch to Our Lady and Kościelna Street (which again descended downhill on wooden stairs, intersected Rybaki, and continued all the way to Wybrzeże up to the barbed-wire barriers. Up to the tank behind the wall). There one had a view of the entire Rynek. To where it narrows. Into a triangle. A funnel. At Freta and the corner of Koźla.

We did a lot of walking at that time because once, one day, Swen and I went for a walk, purposely I think, to the cathedral. To pay it a visit. Once again. To see it. To touch it. That was a necessity. For us. With that cathedral. I don't remember anything on the way. There and back. No doubt we ran. Crouching. The Staromiejski route. The hole, the cellar, someone lying down, the wounded: "Oh, Jesus…"

A small balcony. A washtub. That was private. Women. Through the wall. To the Dominicans. I think. A moment: Mostowa — the barricade — someone lying down — shooting — the view — Praga (a different city?). The Gdańsk Cellar. The old walls. Red. The Rynek.

Finally, the entrance to the cathedral.

Afternoon. Heat. Still, it was more peaceful. And a crowd in the center. The rising dust. We walked forward. Toward the chancel. And it wasn't a crowd of people. But of sculptures, statues, saints, bishops, all gilded, mitered… A crowd… A crush… Chiaroscuro. Heat. But a blurry chiaroscuro. The rest fairly dark. There — in front, all the way in, in a hole (from the door), dust everywhere. We walked over. The chancel had pews in it. On both sides. And an altar, too. And other cathedral furnishings. Armchairs, thrones, gold leaf, cloth covers, accretions. The pews held sculptures, statues — crowded together, face-to-face. But the ones we saw that day were extras as it turned out. And that's not the half of it. They were gathered near the door, on their pedestals I think, or simply broken off, saved, sheltered here, gathered in a crowd from various places that had already been destroyed. There was the atmosphere of a church fair here. An assembly. Or an election. Judgment, finality. As it turned out. And it happened in an instant, in two or three days.

Newssheets, always at a run. Someone rushes in. Hands one over. Others grab for it. A woman snatches it away. The others move on. Toward the altar. For the candles. Here is Swen. He has it now. In his hands, in the center. He's already surrounded. They're hanging on

him! A bombshell… Literally. News:

"Today, at — o'clock the cathedral was bombed into smithereens."

"O o o…"

I remember. That "o" passed through all the stalls, pillars, passages, stairs.

"O o o…"

When it was still standing, although heavily scarred, people said that our side and theirs were fighting there. That barricades were made from the confessionals and from sugar (in sacks).

That's what happened in the Mint, too. Ours here — theirs over there. Or in the Telephone Exchange later on, in Śródmieście. There, it was in layers. On one floor — ours. On the next floor — theirs. And it was defiant, prolonged. Days. Nights. Weeks. Or, as in the Church of the Holy Cross where the partisans were inside the church proper. The Germans, near the organ. People said that they hurled the organ pipes. Ripped them out. Or that the pipes made the sounds. By themselves, screeching and huffing. Or take the matter of the sewers. It was said that in Żoliborz one could slip into a storm sewer leading to the Vistula. Every so often it surges — and sweeps away the people walking in it. And to get to Mokotów you had to bend low, hunched over. And from Czerniaków you practically had to walk on your knees at times. In addition, they were throwing gas and grenades in there. And there was barbed wire in the manholes. Stopping them up.

These were not myths — but living truths. As at 18 Bracka Street. They attacked. Butchered. Retreated.

Light. Once again. Light and water.

I will be confused about the light and water a few more times. Light and water were available for a very long time. But of course there were disruptions every now and then. Then the carbide lamps would be put to use.

I have already mentioned the latrines that were near the cellar beside the stairs. The entryway cellar. Actually, there was one latrine. A large one. With several toilets that you had to squat over. It is precisely there that I can remember the lightbulbs under the ceiling. Or, rather, that they were still there. And on. And that the doors were gone. Well, at least that fat woman from Towarowa was able to sleep on a toilet-stall door. The stalls for squatting were all missing doors. I remember the hinges. Everywhere. The latrine was always occupied. So one waited one's turn. And jabbered away. It didn't matter at all that there were only hinges and no doors. No one paid any attention to anyone else. Nor was anyone embarrassed. There was also no impatience, because who had somewhere to rush off to? We chatted.

With the people close by. Who were waiting. Who were pooping. Who were finished. Who still had to. Who were there for the company. Who just happened to be there. Who had to pee. Who had just dropped by.

One time, for example — this I remember — at night under those bulbs I was squatting in my stall without a door and next to me was an elderly lady wearing a white coat. The whole time we chatted with each other in a neighborly way.

It began badly. Not that it was the first time. (Because there had already been many bad beginnings.) But the feel of it. Of encirclement. This time increasing until it was unbearable. Of course, habituation, self-control, costing a greater effort every time.

“Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord be with Thee…”

“Hail, Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death, amen.”

I remember the glaring identity of “now” and “in the hour of our death,” how many times did I feel it during the prayers, but people prayed constantly, you heard it, here, nearby, here a second time, while taking a walk, from people nearby, or somewhat distant, as you walked farther ahead, and as you just wandered about, whenever something exploded a little more loudly than usual, it was like a wave:

“Hail, Mary, full of grace…”

“Now and in the hour of our death, amen.”

And the praying. That wasn’t so much. The singing. Now that was something.

To Thy protection

We flee…

It drifted out from the cellar:

Oh Virgin…

To the second cellar:

Our protectress,

Our intermediary,

Our comforter…

It passes on:

Oh Virgin…

— but now others already — these have only just begun.

Past the bend they are already up to

Unite us with Thy Son…

Suddenly it’s louder, bombs, and:

Sacred Heart of Jesus,

have mercy on us,

Sacred Heart of Jesus,

have mercy on us,

Sacred Heart of Jesus,

have mercy on us.

Near the altar people are kneeling:

For all those who are dying this night, and for all the dead: Our Father… in heaven… Thy… Thy… Thy… of this earth…

Pounding, the walls are buckling.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us…

That reality — wretched — it’s smoky — you have to keep your eyes hidden inside your collar — or cover them with your hand — dust, rubble, it’s gray, red, dry, and burning in your nose, in your teeth, and on your tongue, breathing it in, the heat, everything stings, sweating…

Oohh Virgin, oohh Virgin…

And suddenly (Most Sacred Heart of Jesus) the counting — One, two, three, four, five (here it comes)

Ooh Viirr-gin
Oh oh — One two three four five six seven… (here it comes)
Have mercy on us
Something's crashing down—
Our comforter
— One two three four five six seven… eight nine ten…

Anxiety had set in, so something soothing was necessary. Singing. Beseeching. Standing. Now without fretting. Tiny rosary-bead pasta. Dumplings. Eating under an archway. Because you take food along. Why not? It can't be helped. If stuff's sifting down, so what. And if plaster covers the bowl over there, too bad, you take it with you and eat because you want to. It also falls into the food. What can you do? It's crunchy. It's dry. You eat. Too bad. But if it's large. Then take it out with a spoon. And eat.

On the other hand, anxiety set in on the theme of where to stay. Everywhere. Among everyone. We, too. We started feeling a need to change places. For a while it was moderate. Then it grew. The first change was just the tunnel. But in the tunnel — as I have already described — there was a dreadful slamming of doors from people running through, from the "wardrobes," and that caused drafts, blowing, it was cold. And also because after the initial spaciousness there was a crush once more, because other dabblers like us turned up with bedding, and it was narrow there, besides which it was a passageway, because I can recall that the tunnel connected two blocks. And that it passed under the courtyard. We imagined that a bomb might break through the layer of earth and the concrete ceiling (who knows, perhaps it was very thin). So we quickly returned to our big red shelter, the one with the chapel.

I think I've already said that in addition to blocks A and B there were also two smaller blocks. It's time to make this clear. C and D. They stood sideways — on Kościelna, from Rybaki to Wybrzeże Gdańskie. There was a kind of triangular little courtyard between them. Aside from this, between block B (ours) and those two (C and D) there was no free space. They'd grown close to each other. So that we didn't distinguish between the cellars, either. There was a maze of passages, cellars, rooms, large cellars or shelters, and in one place a concrete stairway leading down into the cellar of cellars. The boiler room. Little doors. A subbasement room, iron, iron measuring rods, cauldrons, pipes. And yet another lower level, a hole, and there was also the boiler sump; and somewhere nearby was a manhole leading into the city sewer. Which was carefully inspected by us, considered, measured to determine its possibilities, deliberated over, surrounded by us, by people, especially the men, because we were the most afraid,

the young men in particular. Because the first — whom they destroyed — were the young.

Well, somewhere in the vicinity of this tangle was a concrete branch, entirely concrete, gray, hard, dry, rough, and there was chaos, frenzy, and bedding in it as in a laundry. The branch had a door into the tunnel. The one I have mentioned. The tunnel went on its way — long, gut-like, gray, with electric lamps. Up to the doors into block A. Near which Aunt Trocińska had parked herself with her bedding against the wall. And then we. And others.

We went back to our large shelter and immediately started thinking which other shelter to move to. Should we? And when? What were the so-called objective motives, independent of knowing the so-called "law of whirling about" and based on looking at oneself from a distance and knowing the relative value of changing places? Was it for safety? Or just in case? That this cellar juts out a tiny bit and has too few pillars? What? Yes. Something of that sort. Because that next shelter really was deeper or it had more pillars, I don't know which, but it was concrete, completely gray, dark gray, heavily vaulted, and smaller, yes, however, the ceilings were lower, and that was an important consideration. It was under block C or D. Closer to Kościelna Street. But that old, large, higher one had Wybrzeże behind its wall. It's true. Praga. The Vistula. The gunboats. The Orthodox church with the blue cupolas (gilded now, but tarnished). Those trees from the zoo with the Hitlerites in the branches with their binoculars. Pseudo-Gothic (Saint) Florian was still standing then. The tall modern angular tops of the Greek-style Polish State Railway building with the porticos from Targowa Street (till now). So that was considered. And rightly so. "There's a tank behind the wall… sshhh…" Jokes and more jokes. But Wybrzeże was theirs. It had bunkers. Against us. (We had barricades against them.) The Vistula. And searchlights. On the left. On the right. And over the asphalt, on the water, in the sky, and again over the asphalt, on the water, in the sky — one, two, three, and a circle, one, two, three, the ones from the left, one, two, three — the ones from the right from Kierbedź, and again those on the left from the railroad bridge, around and around. (It is true that the entire panorama was framed by two bridges. Two iron gratings across the Vistula. They were still standing. Oh! They served them, all right. The right one, the Kierbedź bridge, the one that began near the Russian church, and the left one, the railroad bridge, the peripheral line, which began near the left end of the zoo, practically scraped against Golędzinów— beyond Golędzinów to Żerań—to the Citadel over here… The railroad tracks ran across its roadway. Two roadways, actually. It was a double bridge. On separate piers. Other trains rolled past under the clickety-clack grates, on thump-thump ties that jumped

and threw up dust because they were wood, boxcars…) But that's nothing. For some time we were still in the red shelter, the original one, the proto-shelter, in the proto-stalls, with a view of the sputtering candles on the altar — then the tunnel, the wind and drafts, calculations, return to the proto-stalls, but this time nearer to the center or the altar — and which number (this I no longer remember) relocation. Into the second shelter. Gray. With pillars. It's darker, quieter; there are fewer people, in fact only a few — for the time being. Bunks? It seems they were there from the first — yes — was there some system that it was all prepared like that? Something of the sort — it seems. So, right away… August 17… Saint Jacek's and Miron's Day. Freta Street. A "wardrobe." Oops! Into the dumplings. Mama was making dumplings.

We were in the tunnel through the eighteenth, the nineteenth. That is, relocation was on August 20 at the earliest. August 26 was the evacuation. And the twenty-third (I think that was it!) was a memorable day. But we spent several good days there. Certainly two or three more days before the twenty-third. Because in memory those two good days seem like several days. Almost like a week. And not only in memory. Because they did at that time, too. During that period right before the worst on Rybaki Street we began counting time differently, faster. It seemed to pass more slowly. But only sometimes. And that was just how it seemed. Actually, time was condensed.

So, the twentieth day of the uprising. We are in a new shelter, beneath the pillars. In times of war, it seems, there is always a return to matriarchy. And especially during that war. That uprising. Particularly with that descent underground, under Warsaw (into the anthill of the shelters). It was a relapse — an explosion. Of the cellars? The caves? What's the difference? Masses of people. The mothers rule. Sitting underground. Hide! Don't stick your head out! Mortal danger. Nonstop. Even if you don't stick your head out. And coping. It's good that candles and big and little carbide lamps were found. Also those chickens, their feathers plucked to make feather beds. Somewhat better weapons than the cavemen's. But not much better. And not all that many. For the chosen. Stocks of food. Although they grew smaller until finally they disappeared. After all, what kind of stocks were there? Animals? There weren't any. The larger ones had been eaten already. And the small ones? Some people kept an animal they loved, took it below and sat with it. With an animal. But that was unusual. Particularly in Starówka. There were fewer pets there. Or they weren't taken. Underground. Or they were brought along and died. Whatever didn't escape, fly away, burn up, cave in, die, was hunted down. Cats disappeared. Dogs disappeared. There's no use even talking about winged beasts. Only that cricket in the wall when it grew dark. And

then, in September — lice.

So, the shelter under the pillars. At first there was a normal crowd. Or rather, plenty of room. One couple. I remember. Young. How energetically she shook her carbide lamp. From Zakroczymska Street.

“They bombed the ruins three times…”

I was appalled. Because the conversation had started with me saying precisely that they probably don’t bother to bomb ruins. So now I didn’t want to believe it. Because we were beginning to count on the ruins as a safer place. That’s fate for you.

“Of course they’re bombing the ruins. And deliberately, at that.”

This is where the question of electricity becomes confusing. It seems it was still on then. But I can remember how frequently she shook the carbide lamp. Her hair was cut short. Always in motion. Even sitting she was in motion. Whenever the carbide lamp died out she would grab it and shake! shake! And “ssss”—and the flame was large again.

Aside from that there was nothing new in the shelter beneath the pillars. Dawn. Heat. Burning. The Sisters of the Holy Sacrament. They were still on fire all this time. Almost the whole time. Smoke was drifting over from them. From high up. From above the escarpment. And from below. There was something there, too. And over there. And immediately: “They’re here already.”

We could hear the planes flying over us. At once, on the first day, I’m sure; I remember a bench beside the wall under the pillars in the gray light from the window. People started coming in from the bombed buildings. In tattered clothing. Hungry. With scarcely anything in their hands or with nothing at all.

“I’m so hungry,” a young woman says.

“Have some,” an old man on the bench interrupts his soup-drinking. And when she’d already begun eating he said, “I haven’t eaten anything for two days, but I’m holding out.”

At night the shells and the “wardrobes” had a heyday. And yet the nights were better. Because they were without bombs. At night there were more actions. The kind for civilians. Volunteer work. Only at night now was it possible to move the barricades. That’s what it was all about. Once. I remember. We had obviously lost some ground. Or perhaps it was only a tactical move. It was necessary to move the barricade several meters. In our direction. On Rybaki Street. Not too far from Wytwórnia. A gathering. Of volunteers. At one or two o’clock. A lot of us. Twenty-odd, I think. Shovels. Pickaxes. Crowbars. Everything is distributed. We get moving. It’s delightfully warm. At this moment it’s even quiet. It seems to me there are even stars. But how could there be stars?! Surely they were veiled by the smoke. A

lieutenant leads us. A lieutenant? Could it be? That's what I was told. During the uprising a lieutenant was a somebody. So maybe it was a corporal. Or a civilian warden, a semi-military person. (I don't want to go into matters of military organization now, but it's worth recalling that all told there were some fifty-five thousand partisans in Warsaw.)

So, we walked. Our housing block (B plus C and D), the picket fence across from it, the escarpment with the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament, the wall. The barricade. The intersection of Rybaki and Kościelna Streets. Again a barricade. Various ditches. On the Wybrzeże side, storehouses and something residential. Rybaki is all twisted, now wide, now narrow. Cobblestones. On the left, the escarpment, above parapets, walls, ruins. (That's right — ruins!) On the escarpment, on the hill behind the cupola of the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament — Our Lady. Gothic. With its distinctive spire. From the side, winds blowing from the Vistula. Finally, the searchlight windmills. What's underfoot keeps changing. Suddenly, dry grass. Or earth slides. Or piles of something or other. I can remember with some certainty only those cobblestones. And also that on Rybaki Street we could see slightly lower buildings. And the barricade. Which we had to move. And then suddenly a silence. Which went on and on. So that at last we became very afraid.

"Ssshhh… The Germans…"

"Shh… They'll hear us…"

We approach our goal. Everything swings into motion. Behind the barricade there was another stretch of Rybaki. And its extension. I think the roadway dipped lower. The moving of the barricade was literal. Slab by slab. Every piece of paving stone. Rail by rail. (Perhaps those tools I mentioned weren't distributed for this job; I've confused this with another nighttime action.) The night wasn't too long. At any moment just about anything could happen. The silence became more and more suspicious. So we developed a tempo. Tempo. Movement. There were many heavy and clanking objects. And — I remember — many sheets of metal. And sheets of metal create echoes. A lot of bustling, people, moving at a trot and rushing to get the next piece, and once more all over again. And all the time, during this hurrying about and moving and passing each other, in this rush, everyone would shush everyone else.

"Ssshhh…"

But after all, with so many people and things, something had to be sacrificed. Because of all that haste. So putting things down was more like throwing. Only it was also like stacking things up. There was so much!

"Ssshhh…"

We ran with the material from the old barricade (which was

growing smaller and smaller, disappearing) into the shadows of Rybaki, to the new barricade, which was growing larger and larger. Passing the apartment houses near the Vistula. And the wooden house near the escarpment. Suddenly someone — could it have been me? — dropped a sheet of metal. Onto the cobblestones. Clang! Crash! A monstrous echo. At that moment everything, the background of utter silence and the August warmth, seemed so suspicious to us that we froze. I don't know whether it was really caused by that. But right away a flame sailed over us. Alive. Whining. And crashed somewhere. Nearby. A shell.

Then a second. A whine. Like a comet. And crash! From the Kierbedź bridge. And a third: Fire — whine — crash! Fire — whine— crash! From the opposite direction, from the Gdańsk bridge, without warning. Yet another from the Gdańsk bridge. Another from Kierbedź. From Gdańsk. From Kierbedź. And crash! crash! Suddenly. They had caught us between two fires. Literally. As it happens, we had just about finished the barricade. And even if we hadn't we couldn't have managed for long. From a third direction too, I think. From the Vistula. Or the zoo. I only know there were these flames from various directions. Intersecting. Crossing each other. Red.

I didn't understand it immediately. What to do? And what about the others? Somehow they began to disappear. I had to disappear. But how? Where to go? I rush over to a wall. No protection. I slip into the doorway of the apartment building near the Vistula. It really did face the Vistula. And all of Praga. I don't know if it had a courtyard. Or how it was demolished. I know there was nothing there. Only the Vistula, Praga, the shells, and the echoing explosions. Someone else next to me. How long could I stay there, stand there? One, two, in a minute I jumped out. And up to the wall. And the sidewalk. I see… that is, I sense: unexpected salvation — a tiny window leading into a cellar. I flatten myself out like a cat. Jump. Down. Someone behind me. Also like a cat. And someone else. Warmth emanated from inside. And chattering: buzz-buzz-buzz…

I landed in a huddled mass of people, a tight crowd, men lined up one beside the other. They were us — the men from the barricade. With something, shovels (that's it, I remember shovels)… But it was so crowded here. And there was absolutely no other exit, hole, hidden recess. Only that cat's window above and that tiny space. Warmth. As much being alive as stench and fear! And pressing together with feline resourcefulness. Barely room for five sacks of potatoes. Every now and then someone else slid in through the window. One of ours, one of the ones still outside. Leap! And he's in. It got more crowded every time. You couldn't move an arm or leg. So you didn't move. After all, this was happiness — just being here. So that cat's leap from the street

didn't mean a thing. Something was going on. Splat! Against our barricade. Something spreading. Splat! Against the pavement. Right here. Splat! Into the wooden shed. High flames. For a moment. Then lower. The wooden shed was burning down.

How long did we stay there? For a long time, and yet not till morning. It began to quiet down while it was still night. Rapidly. It stopped. We rushed out. Our tools clutched in our fists. What we didn't have with us had to be collected. Quickly. What else? I don't remember. Only that it was done quickly. Cobblestones. The sky. August. Something (a shovel?) under my arm. Kościelna Street. The corner. Near the barricade — the one over here — silence — just a couple, a partisan and his girl — sitting beside the barricade, on duty. And chatting away. As if there were no other way, there could be no other way. Only the warmth. Just sitting there. The barricade like a piece of furniture. And that chatting. That I was happy, that I was going home — I remember that, too.

Morning — from the beginning: sun, heat, smoke, planes, bombings, burning. I keep remembering. Should someone wish to picture to himself the three destructions of Warsaw — September 1939, the uprising in the ghetto from April 19 to about May 20, and the 1944 Warsaw Uprising — all of them happened precisely under such suns, heat, burning, planes. Heat, the sunshine, and a blue sky mingled with fires, smoke, explosions, sifting plaster, all of which added (and this is hard to believe although it is true) something exotic. Or rather, an extra whirling in one's brain.

So — that's how it was from early morning. Those were already the days when every hour, every half hour, something collapsed nearby, crumbled, closer, farther off, higher. Part would be saved, if at all possible. If they could, people would dig each other out. Every so often new people would come into our shelters. Sprinkled with plaster dust, with or without bundles, without anything, with children, with families, or alone. They walked in. They ran in. Everyone was welcome. That was obvious. The bunks became more and more crowded. Gray light from the window. There was still room. Then people came in, all the time more and more new people. Several times a day. Now 23 Rybaki, our passageway, was bombed. Now some house on Mostowa. Now on Kościelna. Now Rybaki beyond Kościelna. Now Boleść.

At one point, four generations of the bombed walked in. Lusia Romanowska with Mareczek; her mother, Pani Rymińska; and Pani Rymińska's aunt, Aunt Zosia, in a black cap, a black coat, carrying a dark cane.

"Good afternoon… may we…"

"Yes. Please. Of course. Where are you from? There's room here.

Please come in."

"From 2 Kościelna. Now we're the ones they've bombed. We're lucky to be alive."

We made room for them near us. We — all six of us with our little cookstove of three bricks beside a pillar. They probably sat on a bench. Mareczek was three or four years old. Aunt Zosia had come to visit Lusia on August 1. Lusia was a writer. We hit it off. Talking, talking. But there were new bombs.

"One, two, three, four…"

New people buried. And those who'd survived came in.

"May we?"

"Of course, where are you from?"

They sat down. They told us.

Our entire shelter under the pillars lived in great friendship. There wasn't a single quarrel or argument here. Actually, it wasn't really bad in the other shelters, either. The shelters were getting better and better. And the situation was getting worse and worse.

I don't remember the date. August 23 or 24? In the afternoon. That day we stood up many times. There was some sort of instinct that made us stand during a bombing. Not sit. Perhaps you wouldn't sit it out. Or maybe it was because of the pillars, because we would stand around the pillars. Maybe there was one little percent better chance near the pillars. In fatal situations. Like what happened to Father. Once — around this time — he ran into a cellar somewhere between Marszałkowska and Zielna, when something smashed down nearby and broke through the cellar and plaster began to rain down at an angle. Everyone stood in place and covered his head with his arms. So that in case a brick should suddenly fall down they might still have a chance. And somehow they survived. These people. The ones next door, other people began digging them out right away.

So that was in the afternoon. We stood near the pillars for a rather long time as I recall. The planes were flying over, one after another. And dropping bombs. Then other planes followed. And bombs. We didn't know what was happening in our blocks. What they'd already hit. Where they'd broken through. Maybe it was then that the people were buried in block A, from Rybaki. I know that there wasn't any singing — not then. Nor counting "one, two." Swen's mother, her head against a pillar beside me, was praying silently. Or in such a way that it couldn't be seen. The lights were on then — I remember that. Yes, it was definitely then that block A was bombed. Because the planes kept flying in. With that whining sound. Then the whine of a bomb. Of one, of a second. And a strike. Something would explode. Nearer and nearer. It was then — practically into our shelter — near the last pillar I think, under a lightbulb — that suddenly a

lady in a light, quite ordinary coat stood up. No one knew her. And suddenly, in that silence, she started speaking.

"People, let us pray, and we'll survive. People, let us pray to Saint Christopher"—and she hastily extracted a medal from her purse.

Again something pelted us. And again, whooooo.

She held up the medal.

"People, Saint Christopher will lead us out of this morass."

New planes.

The woman in the coat began to speak, in a monotone, but so that each word reached me, with its full meaning.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High

Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress:

My God; in Him will I trust.

Swen knelt down. Beside me. Near the pillar. The whining. And then we heard that we'd been hit. The lights went out. Something shuddered. Things began crashing down above us. The ceiling from the third floor broke through onto the second.

Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler,

And from the noisome pestilence.

He shall cover thee with His feathers,

And under His wings shalt thou trust:

His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Something rumbled. It was still sifting down on us. But the entire time the woman in the coat kept on talking.

For He shall give His angels charge over thee,

To keep thee in all thy ways…

Something was pouring down above us.

A moment's interruption.

They shall bear thee up in their hands,

Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

I believe it was at this point that she broke off.

Again the vibrations began. A noisy moving about. More and more. Swen squeezed my knee. I pressed my eyes into my face and hid my head in my collar. Is this it already? Already? Yes, too bad, only will it strike from the head? To the feet? Will it knock you flat? If only it could be quick. Two ceilings crashed down together from the second floor to the ground floor, so now it was our turn. Swen pressed his head against my knee. Swen's mother stood there without changing her position. It was very quiet. There was absolute silence. Only something was rumbling, sifting down, still sifting, sifting…

It was black, everything swirling.

Suddenly… we understood that we wouldn't be smashed. And only then did people start to croup, choke, cough.

Someone screamed, “The doors! Are the doors still there?”

“The doors! Take a look! Have we been buried? The doors!”

“Matches! Who has matches?”

“The doors! I think we’re buried! The window’s covered! Matches!”

Zbyszek, coughing, was the first to light a match.

“There’s nothing to see…”

Another; he goes closer.

“No, it seems there aren’t any doors — they’re buried! No! They’re here! They’re here! They can be opened… it’s all right, it’s all right…”

We inspected the bombed-out block A only from the Rybaki Street side, on the next day I think. Swen and I. No one went to inspect what remained above us after the bombing. Not even the next day. No one was curious. I was amazed. It wasn’t clear, I think, what had happened with the lights, although probably they were still on. Where the wires hadn’t been cut. But I distinctly remember people saying on the second day that the showers on the ground floor were working. With cold water. No point in expecting warm. Swen didn’t feel up to a cold shower. I’m also afraid of cold. But it was hot. And besides, I considered that those working showers — after something like that — might be the last occasion for bathing — in such a peaceful time — after the raids — on the second day — toward evening— because, after all, those showers were somewhere above us and under us was — who knows what? — so what did it really look like?

I skirted the corridor, the stairs, the exit, and stood in front of our ground floor on the courtyard side, the second one. I even entered the ground floor. Because it could be done. And those showers really were there. They were in working order. There were even shower stalls. And it was possible — because no one was in a hurry to wash there — to strip naked and bathe in freedom. And what did the rest of the building look like? The rest — those two broken ceilings, that is, fused into one concrete mushroom, which itself was fused with the rest of the ground floor. Our shelter was where the hole with the showers ended and the fusing of the mushroom with the ground floor began.

On that very same day, the second day after that bombing and later ones that went on from morning till night, after my bath, in the evening, after things had quieted down, from the bombs at least, a priest ran into our shelter. Not into ours alone. But to other shelters, as well. And he wasn’t the first priest. He came running in order to distribute to each shelter the so-called last sacraments. He just came running as he was. He had nothing with him. No sacraments, no hosts (wafers), vessels. Nothing. Simply, in Stare Miasto it was already so bad that there were not even wafers for Communion. Everything had

been used up already or was in crumbs. I am writing about this because it is one of my important memories. It is well known that even in the worst of times, the churches are always well supplied with Communion wafers and that they worry a lot about this. *That* is something which is never scarce! Once in religion class I learned about "spiritual Communion." When there are no wafers and you want to take Communion.

I remember that the electric lights were burning then. It happened either in our cellar or the one next door. The shelter was filled with people. I think it was in ours. Because the lightbulb and the ceiling vault were near the priest's head. There was a general feeling of great depression. And of concentration.

The priest spoke: "Now let us all recite aloud the universal confession. 'I confess to Almighty God, to the One in the Holy Trinity… that I have sinned in thought, word, and deed — through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.' "

"And now," said the priest after that choral recitation, "let us all take spiritual Communion."

A short prayer followed. Silence. Everyone bowed his head. And it was over.

The priest moved on to the next cellar.

Either during the night or in the morning we transferred to the large shelter, the old one. Again. It was too terrifying for us in that other cellar, under the pillars. But here too — in this old one — it was terrifying. We had already inspected the entrances, the descents into our little sewer. But where did it lead to? We thought about the real sewer mains. To Śródmieście. But apparently there were crowds waiting to get in. And to get in you had to have passes. And there were crowds waiting for those passes.

We feared the arrival of the Germans. We feared the shadows of their helmets. Especially toward evening. Or at night. Swen and I often looked at the ceiling: Are they coming already? They could rush out from behind their tanks at any moment. The tanks were really coming out now. From Wybrzeże, too. And from Kościelna. The partisans settled down by the windows. And bent over in the window frames, they waited for hours at a time. With a grenade. Or a Molotov cocktail.

I thought about those pillars then. That in case they should come downstairs (the Germans) and start hurling grenades, then those pillars would always be a kind of protection. Against the first throw at least. Later — who knows — they'll order us outside — to dismantle the barricade — they'll drive us in front of the tanks — because they were constantly doing that. After all, Róża Ad. remained here with Basia and she was driven in front of a tank.

Apparently before that, while still in this cellar, she'd said to Basia, "Don't cry; anyway, we won't survive."

So a person kept on calculating, along with other people: What should I do now? Several times already they'd pushed Aunt Uff. and Swen's mother to just get out of there. And twice they'd even gotten ready to go. To upper Stare Miasto. But each time I was somewhere else. For some reason. Once, for an action — I remember that. And twice — however — they'd waited for me, but when I arrived there was such a barrage or an air raid or in general some sort of hell that the departure was postponed. But on August 25 it seems we were ready. We'd had enough of Rybaki Street. Of the Vistula. Of those housing blocks. We. Lusia, Mareczek, and her mother. Aunt Zosia said we should go and she'll stay here. And the Ads. were prepared to leave with us. The question was, where should we go?

"To the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament."

We decided on the change:

"To the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament."

"To the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament."

The Sisters of the Holy Sacrament were practically burned to the ground. But the church itself was still standing. I don't know in what condition. It seems to me it was battered. But basically it was standing. Was the cupola intact? I don't remember. In those times, saying that something was "standing" could be so relative that I simply don't know. But where else could we go, if not there? Throughout the entire expanse of our neighborhood there remained, as everyone said then, only two addresses: 5 Hipoteczna and Krzywa Latarnia (on Podwale), so we considered those two surviving buildings. But since only those two were still standing, there must be such a mob there.

Lusia said, "It would be best to go to 5 Hipoteczna. I have a friend there."

However — an additional obstacle—5 Hipoteczna was a long way off.

But to remain here was impossible. The blocks were nearing their end. At any moment the Germans would enter. For sure.

"What about the ruins?"

"That's it! The ruins."

It wasn't the first time the thought had crossed our minds.

"But they're bombing the ruins, too."

"Perhaps they're not bombing them like they do here, not taking aim."

"Yes, but if they hit the ruins, we've had it, because there's only one ceiling or it's completely…"

And so on in a circle. Always someone didn't agree. But we had

the feeling that we must get out of there.

August 25 must have been absolutely dreadful because by evening, I think, we had decided that we would leave at dawn. The passageway to Nowe Miasto and Stare Miasto was already burned down, bombed out. And to reach the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament you had to scramble along the escarpment. That is, across an exposed "frying pan." Under fire.

The partisans came rushing in at night.

"Who'll go to dig trenches?"

Several people stood up. I did, too.

"Just come back before daybreak," said Swen.

They gave us each a shovel, a pickaxe. And we ran quietly into the street. It was warm. I only know it was Rybaki or one of the so-called streets, because Kościelna and the intersection, too, had already changed radically. They didn't look like themselves or even like streets, for that matter. Or like an intersection.

Different configurations dominated.

Hills. Ditches. Barricade walls. Barricade ruins. Something more or less crosswise. And deep.

I am speaking of changes sensed by smell, by touch: by tripping, by extending your hands, and by the stirred-up powdered ruins and the smoke in your breath; in general, something in silhouette — because after all it was night.

How was that entire upper area rising up there, that is: along the hill, the hill itself, or what was on the hill: Nowe Miasto, the Old Town's New Town? Perhaps it would be better to ask: How was it still hanging on there? In and of itself and above itself? Burned through with live flame? smoky? dusty? beaten? thunderous? smashed?

The Sisters of the Holy Sacrament was on fire from the top down, from left to right. And shattered. To the left — the Dominicans, also shattered, seething, burning. Also downward. Mostowa? Why even mention it? I couldn't see (night, those changes, the pace of digging, because we were already excavating trenches). And from so far away. Definitely a shattered mess. Yes, definitely. That's right. There was no longer an address. A house. That is. What was going on lower down, and in our lower town — could not be put back together— what was there to gather here — to revert to the configuration as it used to be — since nothing was left anymore. The fortress — the housing blocks, the ones across from us, tough, mangled even in the dark. The Mint, or, rather, Wytwórnia, was still visible. Now, too. And from here. Large. Gray. Fortresslike. Like a pianoforte — so expandable, propped up at a slant, and then boom! So resonant. There were also fragments, shells, between it and Our Lady. Oh! Our Lady — the one above Kościelna Street. On the heights. Red. That's my understanding. Not at

night. As for the brick. Because there was fire. I don't remember if it was then. Gothic. With a tower. Old. Firmly planted here. And we along with it. And generations of us before us. Horrible. That here, too, it was ruined. And how it was ruined! Collapsed. Brought down. Clobbered. That's it.

Nothing. We rushed through the job of digging in the hard city ground, with cables running underneath, and having to be careful where and how much to dig. Close. And move it! But definitely, it took only a very little time.

And boy did we leap among those ditches, moving stealthily, going back. Shovels, pickaxes — and back. Fast. My labyrinth. My shelter. My people on their feet, with their bundles.

"We're going?"

"We are."

Each person takes something. We set out as a whole group. Because the Ads. are there, too. Lusia with Pani Rymińska and Mareczek. Goodbyes. Painful. With Aunt Zosia. Dawn was breaking. And that was the point — to leave before the day began. And yet things got all fouled up. Either someone took too long packing or those others started up earlier than usual. Because already there was gunfire. Even at the exit we deliberated again over whether we shouldn't wait awhile. But the majority, I think, began to shout that there's no reason to wait. Because it will get worse with every passing moment. In any case some people began to run outside, at the same time the shells started coming in, and instantly it was a mess. Already, on Rybaki Street, you could see clearly. Several figures, bent under bundles, raced past. I had a blanket full of rusks on my back. We went to the Dominicans' gate (the one with the monstrance) in order to reach the top via the monastery gardens and along the escarpment, because 23 Rybaki was already destroyed.

After a moment's silence they began firing again. Panic. Pan Ad., his pants rolled up and carrying his briefcase, ran in front. Pani Róża Ad., with Basia in her arms, ran after him and called to him to wait, but another shell exploded and Pan Ad. speeded up. So Pani Ad. turned back. Now Lusia, carrying Mareczek, was running behind Pan Ad., also more and more quickly. Her mother (Pani Rymińska) wanted to catch up with them but couldn't. Aunt Uff. and Zbyszek were already overtaking her.

Pani Rymińska cried out, "Wait… wait a bit…"

The rest of us passed by but she kept on calling, "Wait!"

I felt foolish and went back. The same number of steps. I started to lead her. By the arm. Because the ground underfoot was full of debris. And she was stumbling. Since we were going too slowly and they were going too quickly I pulled her along at first. To make her

walk faster. Then I ran up to join them. To tell them to go more slowly. But there was gunfire already. It was thundering all around us. And how! And it didn't help much to call. So I went back to Pani Rymińska again. And again I ran away. In order to maintain some kind of communication. Pan Ad. was farther and farther away. And higher up. On the escarpment. He was racing over the ruins. His pants were rolled up. Then over the grass. Which was littered with bricks. Plaster. He crouched down. And ran on. I can no longer say for sure when it was that Pani Ad., with Basia in her arms, turned back. I turned around, looked back. I ran up to them. I implored them. It was obviously the herd instinct (in me). After that, I was just running. A lot. Through the streets. But they didn't. They were afraid. Because they weren't used to it. To shells and bullets. It's really a matter of becoming accustomed.

So Róża and Basia fell behind. And the rest — always more and more stretched out it seems — walked on — already past the gate with the monstrance, past the monastery gardens, always higher, at a slant. On grass. On dirt. A piece of something. At times a tree. That's good. More or less. As cover. Because we were going to Nowe Miasto. And the situation was getting worse and worse. The more we went toward the right. And the higher we went. Other people were walking, too. Lots of them. Anyway, people were walking down the hill, too. They passed us. That fat woman was also with us. From Towarowa. The one who slept on the door from the toilet. She had something tied to her back. Below her neck. I think. Because she was walking bent over from carrying something.

There began to be explosions from Żerań, too. From them. From beyond the Vistula. The front. And the sound of explosions was increasing. Those were German. Bullets, too. Around us. Thicker and thicker. Aimed right at us, I think (they had to be). It was getting hot. The sun was already out. It was striking our eyes. Somehow Pani Rymińska fell into step. I don't know how long we walked. Uphill. At a slant. We began crawling up to the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament. That is, up to Benon-Bieńkowski. Which was also in ruins but somehow still standing. But we were just beneath it. Already above Rybaki, above apartment house number 23 in the ruins there below. But Benon was still higher up. We climbed up onto the worst terrain. The hardest for walking. Steep. And the most shot at. We grabbed at branches, I think, at the grass, in order to move one step higher. And higher. At anything at all. Because the bullets were going whiz! whiz! At those branches. At the grass. Somehow not at us. But it wasn't that certain. The branches and the grass were gray. And they spurted. Over and over. With bullets. Shells, too. And there was that front. Boom after boom.

During this crawling up over the grass something around my neck loosens, slips from my back and… the blanket with the rusks flies away, falls off… lower… the rusks scatter, every which way. Instantly I begin grabbing at the closest ones. Back into the blanket. With desperation. One handful. Another. A third. But the rest— they're lower down, or in the grass, or simply scattered about. My people are already pressing against me, practically pushing me for several seconds already, not letting me be.

"Leave them, leave them!"

"You see what's going on!"

"Miron, Mirek, Miron!"

I do nothing. After all, there's hunger. Each fistful of rusks is a day of life.

"Miron! Leave them!"

"Miron!"

"Miron! Get going!"

They were all yelling. Aunt Uff. Zbyszek. Swen. Celina. Swen yelled a lot.

"Miron! Miron!"

I have those voices with me today. In my ears, as if alive. They're waiting. They walk a little. Almost come back. They stand over me. With their bundles. Hunched over. Because there's a constant ping, ping. And pounding. But here there's each rusk. So many of them here in the grass. The grass is thick. I'm collecting them, quick as lightning. But…

"Miron! Miron!"

Those who had been below me were already moving above me. Some other people. They draw near. Approach. Grab. Wave. Hunch over. And still the shells keep coming, coming. Not as much anymore. Just enough. Another. Another. It's hard to snatch things up from grass. I'm ripping the rusks out.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," I shout, "I'm coming, I'm coming!"

"Mirek! Mirek!" I remember Swen's mother calling the longest. Her scream. And her continual leaning forward. With a blanket just like mine. Filled with rusks.

"Coming, coming." Because I'm done.

"Done!" And I tie the bundle, throw it onto my back, and run.

Quickly. Quickly. Because it's bad. We reach the ruins of the factory-church. Benon-Bieńkowski. Boards. Thudding. Tap-taptap. The remains of the main hall. I think there were others. The façade of Benon. From above. Boards. A pile of ruins. Pieces of debris. Whitewash. Plaster. Wooden laths. Splinters. Bricks. Eaves. Everything. Whatever there was. Already we're on the escarpment. No longer on that frying-pan slope. Perhaps we'll make it. But whatever's

behind Benon is behind Benon. In any case we make it to those picket fences that are still standing today. The gate. Through the gate. Into the lane. The tiny lane from Benon to the Nowe Miasto Rynek. And already, on the right, Przyrynek, Our Lady — brick, old. On the left, the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament. Full of people. With bundles. Humps. With something under their arms. A basket. Anything at all. Or nothing. Here I remember Pan Ad., with those rolled-up trouser legs, I think, hopping and skipping somewhere over the ruins, over waste and rubbish from the buildings. And that's how I lose him in memory. The Rynek forms a triangle. We are at its base. Somehow we think it over. Heat. Glare. Smoke. Explosions. The front. People.

At the neck of the funnel into the Rynek dense crowds of people, of rubble, are massed together; the rubble already jumbled together, hanging, protruding, flying about — because there's always something else flying past, flying down (after all everything is still changing!) — Freta, Koźla, the Franciscans. Apartment houses split open. Added-on floors. Several stories high. Split vertically. Crosswise. Empty. Into chips. Dangling strips. Of plaster, laths, boards, bricks. There was an awful lot of it. All Warsaw was made of that stuff. Almost. Six-story buildings, too: laths, plaster, bricks, boards. Or, rather, splinters. Crumbly material. It was dry. It crackled. When struck, it spurted out. House after house. Sheet-metal corbels — parapets — were hanging from the empty spaces left by balconies or from nothing at all. They swung. Clanked. Banged. Thin, hollow inside— what one had thought was a parapet — just a wall-hollow wall. In general — Warsaw was betraying all her secrets. She'd already betrayed them — there was nothing to hide. Already revealed the truth. Let it out. She'd revealed a hundred years. Two hundred. Three hundred. And more. Everything was exposed. From top to bottom. From the Mazovian princes. Up to us. And back again. Staś, Sobieski, the Saxons, the Vasas. The Vasas. The Saxons, Sobieski, Staś, Fukier. The Sobieskis, Marysieńka, the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament.[14]

We turned. We. All of us. The woman with the door marks and various others who walked by, walked up, walked away. The front was in full play. Like the earth. Into complete ruins and sky. Blue. Smoke-filled. Red. Shredded. Gritty. Dusty. Sun. Dust in our teeth. And lime. In our nose — gray, smoke, black. The ruins stink. Mightily. The burned-out buildings — awful! And how a blast with its drifting dust stinks. Through your ears to your nose. The nose shares a cold with the eyes. Mechanical weeping. A screen. Literally. What else? The hands work. Somewhat like blind people's. The feet dig into something. The back works efficiently. The whole together, sweaty, exhausted, something spoken in the background. Thoughts, too. The same thing, only faster. An entrance. With people. Under something.

They're looking. Through a hole. A chink. Stairs. Into something dark, damp, crowded. And I don't know why, but that trapdoor, was it a trapdoor? — an entrance (stairs leading down) beneath the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament? Or something made of boards? And deep down underneath it those hordes. That nest. Swen stamps his foot, shouts, digs in his heels.

"I won't go in there. I won't go in there. Let's go. Not to the Sisters of the Sacrament. I won't go into the Sisters of the Sacrament. I won't go in there."

We shove him. But he insists.

"I won't go into the Sisters of the Sacrament. I will not go into the Sisters."

Suddenly a Sister of the Sacrament is standing in front of us. From below.

"We're already very crowded, three thousand people under the church."

She spreads her hands wide; her eyes and head are bowed; she continues, grayly-grayly.

"Really, as many as we could… we accepted."

She breaks off, confused.

"Maybe, but maybe…" we respond.

"But, as many as we could…"

"But, maybe…" Again we — that is, Aunt, Mother, Zbyszek, I, Celina, Lusia with Mareczek holding her hand (she'd carried him on the escarpment, shielding him), Pani Rymińska. And the woman from Towarowa. That woman. The one with the furrows on her from the door.

"Maybe, maybe anyway…"

"Maybe somehow…"

Except for Swen: "No!" and "No!"

"Not here!"

And he stood off to the side, stamping his feet.

"If you insist… take a look, it's crowded… the walls are cracked… so many bombs… have already hit… us, the church, you see."

(Yes, the church of the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament hardly existed above the ground; yes, yes, already by then, and they had nothing left, nothing, nothing, only whatever was under the church, under the trapdoor.)

"All right, please come in — if you can fit — take a look, come in, please," she invited us to enter through the trapdoor.

What was there?

We were embarrassed. Now we were the others. With bundles of rusks. To go in? Or not?

"No, I won't go down there, I won't go in there, no, no." Swen

had made up his mind, he wouldn't allow it.

Then where to?

"Where now?"

"To Our Lady?"

"Are there people there? It collapsed on top of them, oh, what it looks like!"

It looked horrible, Our Lady. Yes. Yes. I recall everything now. What it was like already then.

"But maybe there are people there?"

"Maybe."

"Let's go."

We walked over to Our Lady. It absolutely terrified us. The church, too. And that dark bell tower. Like those games in the countryside, with cocoa made out of bricks, the rest… actually, Our Lady looked just like that.

"And are people sitting there now?"

There were. Indeed. Under that "cocoa" made of bricks. Someone gave us information. One of us asked a few questions. In any case, people walked in. Came out. Dragged themselves inside. Looked about. Sun. Heat. The front. Ours: bullets, hisses, whistles, shells. No one could fit in anywhere. Here, too, some people were sitting. Perhaps two thousand of them. How should I know?

To the Franciscans? Demolished. People are probably sitting there, too. Two thousand. Three. Under the ruins. We go back. The Sisters of the Holy Sacrament, after all.

Once again we're standing there. We stare inside. Under the trapdoor. But Swen screams, tugs at us.

"I won't go in. You go! But I won't go. I will not go. Not to the Sisters of the Holy Sacrament. I'll go anywhere. Into the ruins — yes. But to the Sisters of the Sacrament — no. Not to the Sisters of the Sacrament!"

Swen got his way. We walked away. We walked on. Thunder. The front. Shells flying. All the time. Something or other. We squeeze into the neck of the Rynek. That woman probably somewhere around here. The one from the door. With the furrows. She left. Walked away. Separated from us. I don't know. Because it was all coming apart. The group didn't stick together. Everything was moving. Disappearing.

Garnizonowy Street? It had had it. The Paulines? The Paulines no longer existed. The cathedral? We already know about that. The Jesuits? Next door. It, too — the same as the cathedral. The Augustinians? On Piwna? They're finished. The Dominicans. Maybe the Dominicans. We go down Freta. The same. After all, churches are no good. They're gone, after all.

"Krzywa Latarnia — that's really where we want to be, or 5

Hipoteczna.”

“Let’s go to 5 Hipoteczna.” That was Lusia.

“Or maybe to the ruins? They say lots of people are squatting in the ruins.”

“Should we?”

“Let’s go to Krzywa Latarnia.”

“Yes, they won’t push us out there.”

“We’ll see. But it’s also ruins.”

“Let’s try the Dominicans.”

“Look, they’re still standing.”

They were. As a church. The monastery — in worse shape.

We enter. Into a veritable safe. Pseudo-Gothic. The portico. To the left on the portico is a row of little stoves. More like a freak show than a kitchen! But there are large kettles on each stove. And they are all steaming. Indeed! In a row. A woman is standing or squatting in front of each one. Disheveled. Under the gray light. And waving a lid. A large one. For a cauldron.

We go inside. Straight ahead. Doors. Downstairs. There are still stairs. The church is below us. Inside the church: echoes, booms. A crowd. We turn. Into the nave. To the left. It’s full. Altars. What a lot of them there are. With gold, silver leaf. Baroque. Dancing figures. Holy troublemakers, mystics. They’re fidgeting, from the altar to the side, upward, across. Under the altar, under each one (why exactly?). On the stairs. Figures. Alive. Half reclining. A homey baroque. Also. They, too, were lying crosswise, sideways, but lower down and dressed in crumpled rags.

We go outside… The barricades. Downhill on our Mostowa. On the left the Gdańsk Cellar is done with. Burned down. On the right the footbridge, a channel across the moat. And the walls. The old ones. Reconstructions. Brick. Thick. And there are people here. Against the walls. Spread out. On the grass. Over the streambed. With no water. It hasn’t flowed for four hundred years. The closer to the footbridge, the more crowded it is. And this is how it was under the open sky? Farther on it was just the same. People were sitting everywhere. Lying everywhere. Those walls. Because they go on, they turn. Parallel with Podwale. And we go on, turn on Podwale. The narrow one. It’s there. Krzywa Latarnia.

“It’s here,” says Mama.

“Here?”

But inside the gate (it was an apartment house) an elderly man was standing, bald, perhaps he had a mustache. That’s right; everyone had beards, mustaches, long hair then.

“My dear people,” he says, “what do you want? You want to come here? There are three thousand people here. You couldn’t fit a pin

in… three thousand. They're suffocating. They'll suffocate to death. There's no use talking. You shouldn't even go inside."

We shouldn't even go inside. We didn't speak. We didn't stop. We were already walking on.

"Hipoteczna 5, let's go," says Lusia, "and maybe…"

"Where? And they'll let us in?"

"There are six floors there, I have a friend. And if not, then to the ruins…"

"Of course, to the ruins."

"But where? Which ruins?"

"We'll find some."

"Then let's get going in the direction of Hipoteczna. What if…"

We walk on. From narrow Podwale into broad Podwale. The rear walls of the palaces. People. People. And something roars. Thunders. And the front. And other things, too. Planes. Somewhere already… We have to hurry. We dismissed Długa. It was already a disaster there. Those hospitals. In the cellars. And the burned pilots. Bombed through. Bombed through. Smashed. Everything. And the Dominicans were to experience the same thing a day or two later. Those people. And those saints. Together. Into the cellars. Everything.

"Let's go to Kapitulna. To Miodowa. Kapucyńska is almost directly opposite. We just have to get past Miodowa. But they say it's hard."

I don't remember if we went into Kapitulna and if someone there said, a lot of people actually, because lots of people were just standing there, turning back, that Miodowa was no good. It was flooded. Fenced off. With barricades. Ruins. Artillery fire. From the corner of Kozia, from the eight-story building. And from Bonifraterska Street. And tanks every so often. From Krakowskie Przedmieście to Miodowa. They could go there and back. Shooting. Setting fires.

So maybe by way of Kapitulna. To the right, across something demolished. Or back to Podwale. And through the gate. The Chodkiewicz gate. With the grillwork. Into the same courtyard, the big one. Or was it that Kapitulna was fenced off — with barricades? We went right through that grille, the fence, into the courtyard, into the rubble, because everything here, the outbuildings, the wings, the front was demolished, burned to the ground, stacks of something or other, of bricks, boards. Entire hills. Heaps. Across the courtyard. Stumbling. Maybe we should jump across that way? To the passageway, the gate. From the gate to the Pac gate. Next door to the Capuchins. Kapucyńska Street. And from Kapucyńska there was a passageway broken through to the back of Hipoteczna. It's already close. But what an idea — to cross Miodowa! We could hear what was going on. People were coming back. They warned us.

“No, no, it’s full of dead bodies lying there. Whoever runs across is on the ground immediately. And groaning. Or a corpse.”

We enter a burned-out, completely burned-out, collapsed — only some beams sticking up — façade. Into a vestibule. A flight of stairs leading down. Black. Into an even darker hole. And terrible heat. After a fire.

“There’s someone there, below, let’s go down and ask.”

“Anyway, let’s go down, see what’s doing.”

We go down.

“This is Miodowa, isn’t it?”

“Miodowa 14.”

Downstairs, straight ahead, there’s a woman dressed in something dark, black below. She’s bending over. Doing something. Around someone. A back. A bare back. And a wound. We can see. From a distance. He’s lying on his stomach. On a bed. She’s applying cotton, gauze. A cubicle. Black. And a noise. Water. A waterfall.

“But is there a passageway? Across Miodowa?”

“What? Across Miodowa? Gunfire. Don’t even think of it!”

We can hear shooting and a noise.

“What’s that?”

“The whole street’s flooded. It’s a river.”

“Rushing in here? Falling in?”

“Yes.”

A waterfall, literally. She wets the bandages in the roaring water from above. Luxury!

“And the cellars to the left?”

“That’s the Artisans Guild.”

“Can we go in there?”

“Certainly. It’s empty.”

We go in to the left. Behind the pillars of this anteroom, practically next door, an oil-painting Christ on the Cross has been preserved. An elderly man with a mustache looks in, comes down, questions us, people are advising against Miodowa but he doesn’t care, he’s going.

We go farther inside. Past the threshold. Or rather past what remained of it, past the doorframe that’s been burned down to the brick.

“Let’s stay here.”

“Let’s stay here.”

We all agree at once. A relief. It’s empty. There are ruins. Something is there. Over our heads. A ceiling. Not intact. Something seems to be missing from it closer to the street. But very little. It’s nothing. One or two little windows? One, I think. Yes. One. One or two pillars. Everything black, ashes, heat. Now I know. There were

more pillars. And a second window. On the other side. The courtyard. Farther on — to the left — a doorframe — and something else— just like the first one.

Lusia spreads out her coat behind the pillar on a pile of ash and plaster, sits down, the first one to do so.

"Oof, Robinson Crusoe."

Swen's mother settles into a leather armchair.

"Ooh… how nice."

Aunt sits down in another, exactly identical armchair. Nearer the wall.

"Oh, God… finally."

Zbyszek sits down in a third chair. Celina lies down in a baby carriage, in the center.

"Ooh, good…" Her legs and head hang down because she doesn't fit. But she's happy. Like all of us.

Swen and I grab three bricks. We have a stove.

"We're going to get some boards," Swen and I say and we go out. Because there's an iron bed with springs. Bare. But how can we lie on it?

"Oh Jesus!" can be heard from the other side of the Miodowa gate. "O Jesus, help!"

"That must be him."

So he crawled out, the man with the mustache, and now he's lying there and how can we go there? Who will help him if they're killing people out there?

We look for boards in the courtyard. Everything is dry. Creaking. Boards. Long ones. Two of them.

"Great."

"We'll take them."

We carry them inside.

The man is groaning. Too bad.

"Oh Jesus… help… help…"

We put down the boards on brick supports. And we lie down next to each other right away. Swen on his board. I on my own. On the left is a high window. I'm near the window. Which looks out on Miodowa.

"Oh, how good," I say.

"How good," says Swen.

The wounded man — after an hour — two hours — grows quiet. Either someone took him (?) or he died. We. Too bad. Our own people. There are ten of us living together: 14 Miodowa, the Chodkiewicz Palace, the Artisans Guild (the front of the apartment house faces Miodowa, the courtyard faces Podwale, the side, Kapitulna).

Across Miodowa — the Pac Palace — a niche in Empire style with

bas-relief, grillwork, and a tiny circular courtyard. To its right was the Prymasowski Palace. On our side of the street, to the right, were the Basilians. To the left on our side, the Igelstrom Palace, the Branickis'. Everything with two fronts — onto Miodowa and Podwale (the driveway). To the left, on the other side, behind the Pac Palace, was a circular driveway, a semicircle, a barely recessed wall, stairs — a terrace — a statue above something or other: the Capuchins. Also the Sobieskis. The Sisters of the Sacrament — Marysieńka. Senatorska Street — for all the kings straight from their election— their first thanks, plop, onto their knees.

To the left—
Żoliborz

Marymont

Bielany

To the right—
Czerniaków

Wilanów

Everything — them. The Sisters of the Sacrament we know. That's right: Kazimierz on Tamka Street, the Sisters of Charity — that's them. Antoni on Senatorska Street, into the cloisters, fleeing from election, the king dropped in here for his first thanksgiving. That's also them. Them — the avenue. Them — the monument with water below. So what? Do I want to move you with this? Move myself? Or the king? The Sobieskis?

We were lying on our boards. Not planed. Full of splinters.

Swen said, "May God grant me such a bed for the rest of my life."

"Amen," I answered, meaning that there could be nothing better.

Swen's mother prepared food. Lately we've been eating very little. Twice a day. And only a little bit for each. Mama wanted to please us. She made dumplings with what remained of some vinegar she had.

"What's that you've made, Mama?" Swen asked.

"Actually, it's inedible, I think," I said.

Mama and Aunt tried some.

"Yes, it's inedible."

"I wanted to do it this way for a change. But it didn't work out."

Too bad. It's poured out. We get something else. Maybe coffee with rusks. Food, the liquid sort, we got in jars. Here on Miodowa, at least. I remember. Had we already found them on Rybaki? Or as soon

as we got here? Definitely colored. Green. Bronze. And maybe a little warped. From the fire. Little jars.

All this good fortune on Miodowa Street… in the ashes, we waded in ashes here terribly and also they drifted in through the ventilator — as soon as there was an explosion — piles of soot. Well, all this good fortune was immediately spoiled; immediately afterward and over and over again spoiled by bombs.

At the beginning we didn't move at all. Where could we go? We were in the ruins. A bit of a roof, that's all. Either they'll hit us directly or they won't. If it's a direct hit, they'll break through. Then— there'll be no miracles here. So we sit. They bomb. All around us. Nearer. Farther. The escarpment, Długa, Podwale, Miodowa. We didn't even interrupt our meals. Here. We learned not to interrupt our eating at all. Unless the bombs were really very close. Then we'd hunch over for a moment. Then the planes would fly away. Mama prayed. She proposed reciting the rosary aloud. We refused. Then Lusia, Swen, and I considered what we could do. Either Mama or Lusia had cards. Was it Lusia who had the idea of playing bridge? The three of us played. With Zbyszek. I think Zbyszek sat in an armchair. Those armchairs were comfortable. Large. And strangely bowed backward. Celina didn't want to get out of the baby carriage. She lay there dangling her head, arms, legs. And she was content. I remember that the cards were spread out on those boards of ours. And that we didn't play very much. Because of the planes. The bombing would seem to stop. But not really. They'd fly away. We'd play some more. Again they'd fly over. Bombs. Again watching the ceiling — as for everything. And we play some more.

Then it was necessary to fetch water. For Mama. For cooking. For Aunt. For Pani Rymińska. For washing. For various needs. Water's there — it has to be fetched. I went back and forth with a pitcher and a bucket to that dark room where the wounded man, his wife, and the waterfall were. It could be collected there in a second. I ran right back to wash. Right away. To wash my shirt. There was no soap. But who even dreamed of soap then? The shirt was black. Celina had an idea. We could wash our clothes. Swen was astounded, for some reason. Because we were washing our clothes. Or perhaps he didn't react until the evening? Because I think we washed our clothes more than once. After every thick dusting. Or explosion of soot. It dried in ten minutes. Because it was so hot. Such heat. Unbearable. And I think we walked about in various outfits, as was customary during the uprising; I remember that the wife of that wounded man sat in her slip in that dark room beneath the waterfall. Who cared then about a slip? It was immediately decided that we would use the next room, the one beyond the room nearest to us, to poop. Because going out into the

courtyard was very risky. Even going out onto the stairs, at least onto the higher steps. Yet we went out to the stairs anyway. Because it was impossible to endure the heat. Of course, there was the water. To wet ourselves. But we needed air, too. When it grew dark we would start sitting around on the stairs. Too low down it was too hot, just like down below. But fragments from the shells would land on the steps more or less halfway up and higher. We took note of that. So we chose the middle steps. Where we could catch a gulp of air but the shrapnel couldn't reach us.

We went to bed. Lying down to sleep was actually a matter of sitting down — each in his armchair or carriage, or stretching out on a pile of rubble, like Lusia and Mareczek. Or, like Swen and me — in whatever we had on, and we had only one change of clothing — on our boards. In other words, in the same places we'd chosen immediately — everyone at the same time — upon coming here to stay.

The first night I didn't sleep on the boards next to Swen but on the iron bed with the bare metal netting, just because it was standing there near us and enticed me like a hammock. But because it was impossible to wear a jacket there I had only my one thin shirt right over the iron netting, which formed small squares. I don't know how many hours later it was or whether it was dawn already or not when I got up and went back to the boards. My whole back was covered with little squares, like a shirt of mail. We also had the idea of removing the netting as a unit and placing it on the boards, on both of them. But no. That was bad, too. What could be better than boards? We stayed on the boards.

The first night as well as the following ones (the whole time on Miodowa, I think) there was moonlight. And smoke. And more smoke. Fires. And more fires. But somehow, from our boards near the window, we could see the upper portion of the Pac Palace gate. The frieze, to be precise. In the moonlight, because it was fine weather although the smoke obscured it somewhat — the niche. Gray-brown — I remind myself. At night it was the color of dumplings left to dry (remember, our mouths were always dry). And that frieze. With figures. A procession. The figures were flat, yet they cast shadows. Anyway. In addition, they were in a semicircle. I would look at it for hours. Intrigued. It seemed to me Swen was less interested. I was somewhat offended by this. Dumplings and more dumplings. Everything then was dry, floury, like the dumplings, ready to crumble. And amidst all this there was the waterfall. That, too! An accident — a miracle — a luxury. The waterfall hummed. Clattered. The water fell somewhat lower down, I don't remember where any longer. All of Miodowa emitted noises. After all, a river was continually flowing

along it. The Pac Palace. Come what may. Pac. From the palace. That one, not the other. Here (that's how I imagined it) the magistrate's court convened in the days of Prus.[15]

So, the springs. At night. Dawn. As usual, exceptionally fine weather. Hot. It was hot here, too; in fact, it was like an oven.

"The building burned down five days ago," said the wife of the man who'd been wounded in the back, the woman in the slip, in the dark room beneath the waterfall. A building takes a long time to cool off. And in summer? What are five days! And how long a fire can be smelled! I knew that from 1939. You could smell those burnt-out shells almost until the uprising. Yes. Because you could smell the ones from the uprising for another five years. Even after eight years they still gave off an odor. Only there were the rains, and the soaking, and so many human feces, dried out, new, all the time, that it's hard to say what stank. Well, I woke up with squares on my back. The attempt at placing the springs on the boards. And lying down on them. Finally we gave up. The bed remained where it was. With the coat of mail. Empty. Rusty, iron. After all, it had been burned. How had the armchairs survived intact? I don't know. There was that Christ, too, and some plaster that hadn't peeled. In the anteroom. But the chairs? Unexplained. I don't know if it was then or on the third day, but I think it was that second day, only not in the morning because we just lay there, lay there. There were air raids. We each had a little colored jarful of oatmeal or barley soup. Probably the last of the kasha. Or the next to last kasha. So, we lay with those jars under the doorway between our room and the big anteroom with the Christ on the pillar. I think He was on the pillar. Or perhaps past the doorway on the wall. We didn't all fit into the single doorway. Eight adults. Because the child was held on Lusia's knees. So some of us probably went near the pillar. It was right there. And it counted just the same. Like the doorway. It was something that might remain standing in the event of a hit and the collapse of some part of the ruins. The doorway and the walls were still perpendicular. For the most part. They might collapse, too. But they had a chance. The pillars, too. Whatever they were. True, they weren't concrete, as on Rybaki. Even so. Well, we would take the food in those jars to the doorway and since we were hungry, that's right! Were we ever hungry! — that was a reason. We ate. We looked up. At times soot poured down. On the kasha. The coffee. So we didn't leave any over. That was the second reason. In the so-called hallway a lot of things were sifting down all the time. From above, from the windows. From the ceilings. From who knows where. Of course we brushed it aside. And ate. What of it? Things used to drift down here, too. But less and less.

It seems it was that day that I got up from the boards for a

moment to fetch something, because after all, when we weren't standing in the doorway we were lying down, and I ran out into the yard. Maybe it was to get cups. Into the neighboring stairwell. In the same corner, but next to the stairs. Also a burnt-out cellar. And I found them immediately.

Swen's mother said, "Mirek, you'll manage to find something, somehow. And I could use some dishes. Coffee cups. Because we don't have enough jars. There'll surely be something there."

And there was. They were right there. Just as I entered. I looked around. Warped. Scorched. But you could see they were porcelain. Flowered. From a set. With saucers. I was happy. I dug them out. Brought them over. Swen's mother was happy, too.

"Oh, how nice, I'll serve in them."

Perhaps it was precisely then that they showed me: "Look, shrapnel, still warm! It fell in…"

"Now?"

"Yes, right onto your place, where your back was, just after you walked outside."

"You had just gotten up and walked outside and wham! right through the window. You were lucky."

I was. Because nothing else fell in. Not a piece. I looked that one over. It was warm. A fat chunk. It was iron.

And perhaps it was on that second day that Lusia, Swen, and I organized a literary contest. We had the idea and then immediately:

"We'll do it?"

"Sure."

"Now?"

"Now."

"But on what?"

"The theme?"

"Well, that…"

"Good. That."

"We'll write…"

"For how long?"

"Two hours."

"Good."

"Attention," said Swen, as soon as we had pencils and paper in hand, "we're beginning."

The contest was interrupted. Several times. We ran to the doorway. Then we read aloud. Taking turns. I don't remember anything. I remember only Lusia's sheet of paper, long, from a legal pad, what a page! And her sloping, tiny pencil writing. And that hers was the shortest.

The ventilator used to come open. Soot drifted in. Once it covered

Zbyszek. So we were always laundering shirts. And we were always wetting ourselves to try and cool off. A common rosary. Evening. Maybe it was a bit cooler. Not in the slightest! It was summer. In Warsaw. And in that cellar. So out onto the stairs. We found the ideal step. The center one. We sat there most of the time. Celina, Swen, and I. On one step. I remember that once we sat on two. So perhaps two of them were ideal?

At night, a breath of air. The moon. Shrapnel. “Wardrobes.” Exactly. Bomb-hurling wardrobes. The frieze was fine but there was really only as much peace then as there was during the day. Except that there weren’t any planes. And no one thought to stir from his place in response to those nocturnal weapons. We lay there. Listened. Watched. Something drifted down. Farther off there was smoke, smoke and the moon in a semicircle on the frieze. Tanks drove up from Krakowskie Przedmieście. They would stop near us, somewhere near Kapitulna, near the barricade, no doubt. And fire. And fire. Deliberately. Hollowly. Drily.

Thunk!

And after each thunk! something would sift down. Sometimes we counted. Out loud. Once, half asleep, we counted up to 123. And that time my stomach ached from the explosions and the dust.

We got up. Sun. Heat. It was like an oven in here. The building wouldn’t cool down for anything. Perhaps it had cooled off one or two degrees? But what difference did it make if it was 107 or 105? And it was that high, for sure. The only breezes were from the bombs, the mortars, shells, grenades, and tanks. And these had the negative aspect that they always made something fall down. Something small, powdery, but with a kind of ash-step or, so to speak, an ash-shudder. Or the cornices would break off, the moldings, brackets, walls, low walls, bricks, brick facings, plaster, pieces of beams; they pushed around the piles of rubble, the ones above us, the ones near the front and by the gate. It seemed to us that something was always being fired from the tanks and the mine throwers (those “wardrobes”), hurtling in either from the gate or from the building’s front. That front was shrinking all the time, its columns, openwork, pendants. The “wardrobe” with its one-two-three gouged everything, gouged and hurled. It wasn’t called a mine *thrower* for no reason. At the beginning we were afraid of the flamethrowers. That they could reach us. Through the holes, the open grillwork. The same with the tank. That it could hit us. With one of its volleys. Or set us on fire. The same with the grenades. But after two days we got used to them, knew that they wouldn’t penetrate to us. If only the tank crew wouldn’t storm us. If only they wouldn’t suddenly hold their guns on us. Scream at us. Order us to come out. And at the same time fire at us. And then drive

us in front of them as a shield. Everything at once would have been just too much. But the planes. It was impossible to get used to the planes. The cellar no longer amused us as a novelty, as ruins. Perhaps it might have amused us. But it didn't. Every fifteen to twenty minutes, continuously, they flew over. Dropped their bombs. Flew past again. Dropped their bombs again. Every twenty minutes, ten minutes of standing in the doorway. That's right. Half and half. I don't remember what was happening with the front then. I remember this. The doorway. Swen's mother leaning her head against the edge of the wall, under the oil painting of Christ. They fired blindly. They didn't care what they hit, as long as they destroyed everything. So the same ruins were hit for the third time, the fourth time. The ruins were disappearing, like the remains of these latticework shields.

We would get up early, but not to eat, because I think that by then we had already begun to eat only once a day. Toward evening Swen's mother prepared coffee from what remained of the kasha. For everyone. She gave everyone a cup. Without sugar, of course. How long had we been without sugar? From the very beginning, I think. And three rusks each. Thin ones — bent, broken slices of dried black bread. Later we had only two each. That was the most solemn moment. And either before or after it we recited the rosary. The day was long. Although apparently people say that at the end of August the days get shorter, that's nonsense. So much sun. Heat. And those bombs. And standing in the doorway. Counting.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve… well… a dud… oh."

And immediately:

"One, two, three, four, five…" Boom, uproar, something is collapsing! Us? No…

And again:

"One, two, three, four, five, six…"

I was still reading from Titchener. Those thirty-six or thirty-eight pages. From Freta Street. Did I write anything? Perhaps I was still working away at my huge poem. I remember telling Swen the second or third day on Miodowa, in a relatively quiet moment, that I would like to read it to him.

"Good. You know what, let's go to the third room to take a dump and you'll read it to me."

"But, you know…" I wavered.

"What's the matter?"

"No, not while we're shitting."

"Why?"

"Just because; you go and when you come back we'll go behind the pillar and I'll read it to you."

“Fine.”

And I read it to him behind the pillar.

In the meantime there was trouble with water. An unpleasant half surprise. Miodowa was flowing, flowing, roaring; the moon was shining. But the sun was shining, too. And those pipes that had been hit were clearly emptying out. The roaring stopped. There was still something flowing. But by the third day the waterfall in the dark room was no longer thundering. At first it still fell in a trickle. Then just barely. Then whatever was left. Just drips. We had to stand there patiently with a bucket. In order to have a supply for the next day at least. Laundering was over. No more luxury. After three days or two and a half we were already without water.

I took the bucket. I ran out into the courtyard. It was cluttered even more than before with various things. The first time I scooped up some water nearby, in our courtyard I think. But that was also the last time. To get water there. In our whole area, in fact.

By then, people were already coming to join us. People. Living there already. That Tuesday. They came over. They came downstairs. Just as we had. They walked in. They stayed.

“May we?”

“Of course.”

A whole family. Large. I don’t remember from where. An old aunt was with them. She groaned. And immediately lay down on the iron bed. On the springs. And didn’t move any more. She spoke through her nose. Indistinctly. She was always complaining. That her whole throat was burned from the fire. In fact, she was scorched. Those women, several of them, healthy, bovine women, affirmed it, knew about it, had witnessed it. And yet they shushed her. And repeated, “She’s exaggerating.”

Then, when she was groaning during the night, they said to her, “You’re exaggerating, Aunt.”

“You’re exaggerating.”

There were other people there, too. In the corners near the walls. Because they came over. They also said, “She’s exaggerating.”

“She’s exaggerating.”

They also came into that first anteroom. And the hall behind ours. The women from that family, since we were sitting in our part and eating only once a day already, would go and cook in the anteroom where Christ was. They had a stove there. Once they walked past carrying some fat dumplings. Freshly steamed. White. Flour dumplings. A heaping bowlful. Fragrant. Sheep dumplings, as I used to say when I was a boy. They walked past us behind the pillars, carrying the dumplings. To their nest. I don’t remember anymore where it was exactly. In the corner near the courtyard. Not so much in the corner as

near the wall. They were the third group here. After the woman in the slip with the wounded man in that dark room which was now as dry as tinder. And after us. After all, I've said that the shelters weren't anyone's private property. Underground Warsaw was communal.

Swen recalls this: "Do you remember how that woman carried those dumplings… fffull…?"

Perhaps the woman would have given us dumplings. If we'd asked. But it never entered our heads. And it wouldn't have helped the situation. There were still two rusks for each of us with a drink of coffee from the charred porcelain. And what of it that the women yelled at their aunt? The others did, too. After all, they didn't really yell so very much. Although from Wednesday through Thursday was quite long enough. And in chorus. Loud enough. Until she stopped groaning. I have to admit that. The wounded man on Miodowa, the one with the mustache, it was his own fault, also was left alone. In terror for oneself, out of fear of sticking one's head out.

What about the news? The newssheets? I think they still reached us somehow. They were gotten hold of. One knew things. That the so-called general situation was worsening. I was about to say that it couldn't get any worse in Starówka. But that's not true. The worsening really had no end. It always turned out that things could be worse. And even worse.

We were awaiting the demolition of the bridges. We were astonished that the bridges were still standing. Red Florian was standing in Praga. With its towers. And the Orthodox church, too. With its sky-blue cupola. Like fair weather. We were waiting for one more symbolic, evil, preordained piece of news. For the end of the Sigismund Vasa statue on its column. It was still standing. It remained standing for a long time. Until we learned through the newssheets that they had demolished it.

Our kings were not protecting us. Nor were we protecting our kings. Nor what had come after them. Everything. Everything.

O, my Piwna Street! Of the Augustinians. Of Vespers. Psalms. And the Seven Plagues. I once went to Vespers at the Augustinians. There was a crowd. They were burning incense. There were palms. People were singing. Vespers. Those Jewish matters in a Gothic church, in the twentieth century. And when they got to

Thou art a priest forever

After the order of Melchizedek…

I was very moved. In those words I could hear, I remembered, my first Vespers. That is why I am writing about this. Because it is all intermeshed. Everything. My neighborhood, too. Leszno, Chłodna. And Muranów. Because the majority of my churches were there. Then the Jews. And Karpiński. And that woman near the pillars.

In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, o Jerusalem.

Praise ye the Lord.

Then there was also something about "within thy palaces."

Jerusalem in Stare Miasto or Muranów. Then in the ghetto.

There was yet another Psalm:

Except the Lord build the house, they labor
in vain that build it;
Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman
waketh but in vain.

And further along… I remember only this:

(something) not be ashamed
But they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

Only then did I understand that this refers to a defensive gate, like the one on Podwale or in that classic Roman drama by Shakespeare. People are forced out there. People shove other people through such a gate. At that time I thought — on Nowolipki, on Leszno and Piwna Streets, in the crowd, beneath the palms, that it was a gate like the one at 99 Leszno or 37 Poznańska, a gate like so many others. A front gate. An entrance. With a sign: "Peddlers, singers, musicians, and beggars prohibited." With niches on the sides and iron Saint Nicholases. Usually iron. Grillwork and flowers. And farther on, in the center, in front of the entrance to the first courtyard well: an oil painting of a sphinx on water lilies, above the stairwell. Or tiles. With garlands. Festoons.

Well, Our Lady on Piwna Street. Who would have thought at that time when I was listening so intently to those vestibules, those gates — build and keep watch, praise be the house of the Lord — that now, running out with a bucket in search of water on Podwale, I would see that "Zion," the second one, turned to rubble, gray, red, "Our house, the house of the Lord"—the second one after Muranów, after the elders who shall judge the people, that I would see those Augustinians. Their backs. From Podwale. Demolished. No more Seven Plagues. Palms. Crowds. That singing about Jewish matters. From Melchizedek. Who (I learned this later) appeared, no one knows from where, and — the first to do so — performed a bloodless sacrifice. And immediately departed.

It was sunset. Heat without letup. And bricks, piles of ruins, gray, ashen, stone upon stone. With fires, rubble, the clanking of the bucket, mine, empty, and of other buckets that passed by. I associate this with sunset. Climbing up Podwale. On the other side. Higher and higher. To mounds of something or other. Nothing specific. It seemed to be Rycerska Street. You could recognize it because it was crooked. Because it was a red path, at third-floor level, made of shattered

bricks. Or rather, buildings. So many had piled up already. So I'm running along Rycerska. Buckets clanking. Empty. No water anywhere. Only people searching. No one found any. Suddenly, I look: several hundred twisting meters ahead, beyond the rise, the red rise, a woman is running, carrying something, in a bucket, a pitcher. I run. I chase her. I look: she's carrying something. Because it's not clanking. And she's slightly bent over to one side.

I run. I catch up with her. I ask, "Where…"

I don't finish. Because she's looking at me and also into the bucket. I look into the bucket, too. Soup. I don't know why when I told this to friends after the war, I said that the soup was made from bilberries. Only recently, some twenty years later, have I begun to wonder where those berries could have come from. At the end of August? And at the end of Starówka? There. At that time? And so many of them. So much soup. Yet I can see it and it's black.

But nothing came of it. I missed it. I ran. I ran up. I ran down to something lower. I turned. Piekarska Street? How should I know? Again, people. Buckets. And nothing. Planes. Bombs. No point in even thinking about shelter. Because where? And when? Already there are loud blasts. Explosions. And the next ones. And again they're flying over. The diving. Whining. Bombs. The only thing to do was to run even faster. With the buckets. Everyone was running as fast as possible. With buckets. Jugs. But that was no help in this situation. Running without bombs is different from running with bombs. It was a fact that they were bombing something nearby. And a lot. Because there was rising dust. And smoke. Reddish-brown, gray, brick-colored things were moving — those Pompeiis, ashes. And suddenly a burst of news: water was gushing out on Szeroki Dunaj. From a pipe. From a bomb. At that very moment. We clank. We all run. There. Into that dust. Into Wąski Dunaj. Over the mounds. To the corner of Szeroki Dunaj. Everyone came running. And suddenly a miracle — actually visible — water gushing, like a fountain, from a large cracked pipe, pierced through, pushed up out of the ground. Joy. A crush. Collecting. Clanking. And since suddenly there was a lot of water, quick as could be. And everyone takes off. I came running back to Miodowa. Lucky. With living proof of good luck to show. And to drink. Immediately. Mama was delighted. And I was proud. Then night. Noise. Blasts. Rosaries. The moon on Pac Palace. The frieze. We sleep.

In the morning, movement. A raid. The doorway. And then we check why the old aunt is so quiet. But the aunt isn't alive.

"Well, she's been dead for some time."

"When?"

They carried her out. The women, that is. The family. Out to the

courtyard. But since the bombing was intense they only set her down quickly, practically threw her down, at the foot of the stairs. Somewhat to the side. So that she lay there. Squatting. Sprawled. All day, all night. And longer. Because there really was no time or way to bury her. Apparently.

I don't know if it was toward evening of that day or the day before that Celinka, Swen, and I were sitting on the two middle steps when we started discussing whether we would survive.

“You know”—Celinka smiled—“I have a premonition that I’ll survive.”

“I do, too,” said Swen.

Celinka replied, smiling, “Yes, but my friend said the same thing and she died.”

My second foray for water. With searching. This time even more hopeless. Because where? Count on a bomb hitting a pipe a second time? Wandering aimlessly. Searching. And nothing. With that bucket.

“There’s water! 5 Podwale! 5 Podwale!”

“5 Podwale, corner of Kapitulna, a well, wooden, they’ve uncovered it…”

I run. Others do, too. Even better that it’s near us, only via Kapitulna. But I’d run somewhere far away. The nearer I got the more people there were running with buckets and jugs. Even passing us already with full ones.

“Yes. There’s water!”

I run in through the gate of number 5. There it is. A crowd. The clanking. A line. A small courtyard. A well. In the courtyard. Wooden. Green. Moss-covered. Square. Such an old one that no one had known about it. Someone discovered it. Who? There are no people here. The house seems to be standing. Partially. But it’s absolutely unusable. Which means some small part of it is standing. Maybe not even burned out. Just something left after the bombs. That’s right. There were bombs all the time. Because something that probably was an office was serving as a place for the line. Because there was a line. And it kept growing. And there were also bombs. But no one gave up on the water. And so people stood there. Patiently. On the ground floor because it was the ground floor. But as always — not on the top. It was hot. Daytime. Bright. And we stood. For a long time. Because the well was really old. And it was necessary to lower and draw up in turn (with a pole or a rope) bucket after bucket. And that place, it was an office. I inspected. What was left of the furniture. Or rather, a cabinet. Shoved against a wooden harmonium. Which had been pushed out of the way. Full of paper. Blank sheets. For writing. I took a pile for myself. That was sheer luxury. The very fact. And the quality. I remember the watermark. SIMON, and something else, I think. I didn’t have any paper, so I was very happy. And I waited. For my turn. An hour. Two. I think two. In addition to the cabinet there may have been something else. With debris. Nothing else. Ruins, of course, plaster and laths, bricks, openings without door or window. You walked out to the well through such an opening when your turn came. Because it did come, finally. Mine. I lowered the bucket. I drew it up. Someone even helped me. He knew how. And I ran with the water and the paper to my people. To my ruins.

The night was definitely moonlit. With the frieze across from us. And something pounding (a tank, all the time). And the hideous heat. The heat from the fire. We definitely ate one and a half rusks each for the entire day.

Those days on Miodowa Street were spent entirely under bombardment. From morning to night. All that time spent standing in the doorway. With a view of two stories of ruins. There was no vaulting in this place. None. Only the doorway. Actually, I've exaggerated about the vaulting. I don't know if there was a fragment above us. Perhaps there was. But we only counted on the doorframe. About their flying over. The planes, that is, in the dark. I exaggerated about that, too. Precisely on August 31, as we immediately learned, the "Chrobry" Battalion, more than two hundred people, returned from action. To their quarters. To the cellar in the Simons Passage (on Nalewki, near the Krasiński Gardens, called Street of the Ghetto Heroes today). They all collapsed onto their field beds and bunks. That is, they didn't so much collapse as barely make the motions of pulling back blankets in order to lie down and then, the disaster. Only four or five of them survived. Even though they survived, they had no idea — when, what, how. Just that suddenly there were bombs and firing. I spoke with them, with those who survived — three or four men and one (I think one) woman. In 1946. In September. At that time, from the Saxon Gardens to Żoliborz, Warsaw was a desert. The Saxon Gardens, too. Actually, from Aleje Jerozolimskie to Żoliborz. I was a journalist. I was writing about the exhumations. People testified that here and there, there was this and that. And then there was the question of identification. Lists. Of the identified. Here, too. Only, those few survivors began the exhumation on their own initiative. Several workers did the digging. There was a basin, a large tin basin, for heads, arms, legs. But it wasn't easy to recognize what was whose. I remember this: "Is this Zdziś's leg? Or maybe Ryś's?"

And it was tossed into an empty carbide can.

Don't be surprised. That was common then. They had a fire going. On the Krasiński Gardens side. Because the first frosts had set in. But they gave up. Digging farther. Because the Simons Passage was a single tangle, a pile of rubble, and so strong and fused together, with iron rails sticking up. Because the building had been big and strong. So that when it (along with the rest of the ruins) collapsed, it caved in. So much for that. Later they took it apart. That was proper. They dug them out. Buried them. But did they identify them? I don't know. Well, that's all.

On the first of September in that famous year it was also splendid summer weather. Also a Friday. Five years earlier (but they included two leap years) — and so history made a complete circle. I remember

thinking that to myself at the time.

Now I think that the words about how “the enemy attacked Poland from out of the high sky” are well chosen. Because it was fair weather and in fair weather the sky is high. And the planes are, too. But in 1944 the enemy attacked from a low, roof-level sky.

We didn’t know yet in the morning that the first day of September would be historic. At dawn, that is. I think that day began very early. The planes rose with the sun. At five a.m. bombs were already falling, further destroying what remained above our heads. And people were already dying. Some from cave-ins. They were also dying at night. But from other causes.

Well, on September 1, early in the morning, Swen’s mother announced to us that we had nothing to eat. I say “us” because the whole cellar was already on its feet. Each said what he had to say.

Definitely, after standing in the doorway for a while Swen and I decided to go out. To search. For food. How?

“Maybe something will turn up somewhere…”

“If not, we’ll have to steal.”

“Yes, we’ll have to steal,” we told each other out loud.

And we went out onto the steps — after estimating the heat and the danger — and went into the courtyard. We stood for a while beside the door, above the sprawling, half-squatting corpse of the old aunt. By what instinct? We stood there and looked at her. She had a wedding ring on her finger. Only after the war did we each confess to the other that we had thought about that ring. But whether or not the ring would have been useful then is an open question. It wasn’t only money that was useless.

I must confess that for a long time I hadn’t liked the first of September. Perhaps school was the real reason but a person convinces himself that he’s had presentiments. Or perhaps that date had had something disquieting about it for a long time. It almost certainly had.

And then — that day — in addition to the need to look for food, something else drove us out. After standing for a long time over the aunt of those women we began to crawl through the passageways, the courtyards of Miodowa, in the direction of Krasiński Square. And it became immediately apparent that we weren’t the only ones wandering about. That there was anxiety. That it was the end. Stare Miasto was defending itself with its last ounce of strength. But there were fewer and fewer people. And nothing to eat. The partisans didn’t have anything, either. And an attack was in progress. From several directions. Explosions. Shooting. Cave-ins into the last remaining cellars. The sun rose higher in the sky. The heat increased. People were walking in circles. Civilians as well as partisans. Helplessness. I don’t know when people started saying that the Germans were already

entering Freta. And that Starówka had capitulated.

I think we returned to our cellar. Something was being talked about there, discussed. But what? Mainly it was the fact that at some point the Germans would break into the cellar and begin throwing grenades. Again, those pillars. I thought: Eh, if only I could be behind a pillar. But would that have any effect? In fact, did our talking, our deliberating have any meaning? Heat, noise, chaos, counsels, smoke, because there was fire and more fire, the stench of burning, and ever greater anxiety. We went outside again. The two of us. The rest stayed there. Zbyszek, too. I don't remember exactly what happened between the time we walked away from the old aunt to the time we heard the first piece of news. And what happened between the first piece of news (the Germans on Freta) and meeting our mutual acquaintance, Henio. Henio was wearing the uniform of a partisan — German discards, that is, a tankist's suit, I think.

"I'm an orderly," he said. And we sat down in Fuchs's courtyard, I think, in the building behind the Basilians. On a step near the wall, maybe even under the wall, perhaps even on the ruins of something like an entrance covered by a roof.

"Listen," said Henio, "we're retreating today through the sewers. The severely wounded are being left behind, but our lieutenant has a favorite who's seriously wounded, and we have to transport him, will you do it?"

"Yes!"

"You can both go because I can say you'll have to take turns carrying him since he has to be carried on your backs."

That leg of Swen's was still painful. The knee.

"That's nothing, I'll be the one to carry him," I said, "and you'll help me a little."

"But listen, there are three of us," Swen answered Henio.

"Three? That's not so good."

"My cousin, we can't leave him."

"It can't be done."

"Well, too bad," I replied (how easy it is to give someone up!).

But Swen was loyal.

"No, we won't go without Zbyszek."

Henio began to relent.

"Well, it doesn't depend on me, because if it did… but maybe I'll try to explain… or I can simply mention two and the third will join up, or never mind, the three of you come, to Długa Street"—I think he gave an address—"on the left from Krasiński Square. There's a hospital there. And the wounded man. That's the assembly point. The Germans are taking Stare Miasto, but there'll be a defense. The manhole is on Krasiński Square. Don't take anything with you. They

won't let you through the manhole with any objects. A knapsack at most."

"Fine"—we didn't dare believe in those sewers yet. That was our dream. To get through to Śródmieście. The legend of the sewers, of entering with passes obtained through friendships and only in the highest circles, had made its impression. That it might be dreadful in the sewers, that people drowned down there, that they lost their way, that from Mokotów, the lower part, you went on your knees because it was three feet high, that some of the manholes were held by the Germans and kept open, that the Germans tossed grenades inside, didn't frighten us at all. Just to get away from here! Only the women would stay on, and they always have it easier.

"You'll have to dress the wounded man"—here he gave us his pseudonym—"you'll have to pretend that he's only slightly wounded, because otherwise they won't let him into the sewer. Well then at — o'clock"—Henio named the hour, two p.m. I think—"be here… see you…"

Or maybe he didn't tell us the hour, since no one had a watch; maybe he just said "in an hour"—yes, that's more likely.

I know that we ran back to our people. That we rushed in with a great deal of noise. Aunt Uff. was happy that Zbyszek could go, too. Zbyszek was also happy. And Swen's mother. For us. Although it was hard for Swen's mother, Aunt Uff., Celinka, Lusia, and Mrs. R. to part with us. Especially for Swen's mother. And for Aunt. And even more so because it was for the unknown. At least in Śródmieście there was Aunt Uff.'s daughter, Danka, on Żurawia Street. So Zbyszek and Swen had Danka there, and I had Father and Zocha. And above all, we had Halina.

I think we already knew that we would exit at the corner of Nowy Świat and Warecka. So Father, Zocha, and Halina would be closest. Because they were at 32 Chmielna. Between Bracka and Marszałkowska. So we'd go to them. All three of us. Directly.

After those hopeless hours our excitement about the sewers was so great that the air raids, the shelling which must have been even heavier than usual on that last day (although any scale of measurement had long been exceeded), had no effect on us. Of course, a so-called final attack had its specific characteristics, which I already knew from Wola. But here there was an antidote: the sewers.

Anyway, it was a historic day. The fall of Starówka. Starówka was already famous throughout Poland. In the camps, too. And in England. And the sewers. These. The ones from Starówka. They were already famous. Already, Warsaw knew that it was a historic day. But the knowledge wasn't so very wonderful.

Our haste was communicated to the others, too. Especially to

Swen's mother and Aunt Uff. That is, to the two mothers.

"Wait a minute, wait!"

"Wait a minute, take this…"

Did we take something? No, I think not. But during this time, from what must have been the very last supplies, they had hastily fried up two pancakes for each of us for our journey. On the stovetop. The kind that people cooked on then. No, not on a stovetop. Forgive me. I forgot. On those three bricks behind the pillar. It became apparent only when we were saying goodbye. They stuffed them into our pockets. We didn't want them. Because we were going to Śródmieście. And this had used up their last supplies. But they didn't want to listen.

The women all said goodbye to us in a somewhat unusual way. Swen's mother and Zbyszek's mother made the sign of the cross on each of our foreheads in turn and kissed us. That was probably the most moving goodbye of my life. They wept. In the end, Zbyszek's mother never saw him again. He's alive. In England. But… His wife (he got married) sends letters. For him. So he's alive? So it seems. But why should it be that way?

We left the cellar. 14 Miodowa. By the back. Along the right side. To Krasiński Square. Here you crossed Miodowa. Behind the barricade. Onto Długa. We could make out the assembly point just past a throng of people who were already waiting by the walls.

That house is standing today. Again. The first one down from the corner. I think that then it had a gate with a niche. Or does it only seem that way to me? The most amazing thing is that the house was still standing then. Still. At least partly. Inside it was like a beehive. It was really swarming. And I think I'm not imagining that it was like that on the upper floors, too. On the ground floor and the second floor, at least. After all, it seems I went upstairs. With Swen and Zbyszek. Yes, right up to the second floor. Henio showed us. Where to go. To wait. What to do. It was amazing that we found each other. Don't think there weren't any civilians there. A crowd of partisans and a crowd of civilians. Running up and down the stairs. No one paid any attention to the bombs. It turned out that the sewers had the same effect on everyone. It was a good thing a bomb didn't hit us. But none did. We had to hurry. Every hour counted. The offensive was gaining strength. The defense was costly. And since in general the seriously wounded and all civilians were being left behind, the rest at least had to manage to retreat, the last ones being those engaged in the defense, who now had to defend only the manhole and themselves in order to descend into the manhole. But for the time being there were still lots and lots of people waiting. In addition, I noticed, there was more than one seriously wounded person. And, really, a crowd of civilians.

Smuggled in, like us. To help out or simply because they knew someone. And all of this prolonged the retreat. But the plan was adhered to at all costs. Order. Therefore, there was no longer any room for being afraid.

We rushed after Henio into a hall that was crowded and noisy with chattering. With movement, above all. With people, too. And with plank beds. Stacked up. And with various other things. The preparation of stretchers. Something — was it knapsacks? — was being stacked in a row against the wall. It was forbidden to carry knapsacks. So whatever it was must have been something much smaller and more essential.

On the bunks various people were sitting, lying down, dressing themselves and being dressed by others. Partisans. Girl couriers, paramedics. And, no doubt, various families. Extras. There was madness in all this method. Chaos with haste. But over all of this reigned the chief task of orderliness and moving people out. Our wounded man was lying on a ground-floor bunk. I don't remember if I dressed him or if the partisan women had already done that; I remember that I had to put shoes on his feet. And to tie them. Just getting this done went on and on. My wounded man was emaciated, very young. He had been shot in nine places. I thought it would be difficult to pretend that he was all right. He was semiconscious. He was groaning. Everything hurt him. And that wasn't surprising. Every time I began putting on his shoe he groaned, writhed, pulled back his leg. I said something. I cajoled him. I waited a bit. And I tried again. I don't know what was happening outside. In the sky and in the city, that is. Lieutenant Radosław (not the famous one) rushed past us a couple of times.[16] Blond. Over thirty. He introduced himself to us. Also in a rush. He was worried about getting shoes on the wounded man. And even more about the sewer. Henio rushed past a couple of times. And a nurse. A colleague of his. And of the wounded man. From the same division. She looked at my work. I was already beginning to pull on one shoe. I don't know when I finally pulled it all the way on. I think she helped me at one moment. It seems there was some flexibility in our group's schedule. I'm not sure, though. Perhaps it actually depended on our packing. And on putting on the shoes. Even so, people were entering the sewer nonstop. Finally we got the shoes on him. But then the lacing turned out to be just as difficult. Because his feet had also been shot up. Some people had watches, though. I exaggerated when I said no one did. Apparently putting on his shoes and lacing them took two hours in all. Maybe a little less. But not much. We were in that hall a very long time. Then we were about to leave. But still we waited. For a signal. I remember a lot of coming and going, bustling about, carrying things out, shouts,

commands.

Finally, our turn. I with the wounded man on my back. He was light. But he hurt all over. He was trying to help me and himself. As much as he could. At the beginning, the walking out to the manhole, even he was infected by the idea of the crossing. So, there was me carrying the wounded man, and Zbyszek, Swen, Radosław, Henio, and the nurse with a rucksack. And their people. Except that I only remember those who were walking closest to me. Swen walked behind me, Zbyszek behind Swen. Henio behind Zbyszek, I think. The nurse in front of me. Or perhaps Henio was in front of her. And Radosław ahead of them.

We walked quickly downstairs. Straight to the gate. I remember that from the gate we slipped over into the niche. And there we waited. Then a bit farther, but still near the gate. I remember that the wall of the building and the gate were yellow. And that there was terrible burning across the way. And not just in one place. Flames several stories high. And smoke. It stung our eyes. Blinded us. The sun was shining through the smoke. I think that there were a great many civilians in front of us and behind us. Not only young men. Old men, too. And old women. Someone was sitting — in the line— in a folding chair. The line was very crooked. Because of the niche. And we had to be right up against the wall. Because suddenly as we came closer to the street we could feel the terror. I don't remember if there were planes. Most likely there were. And all we could do was flatten ourselves. Against the wall. They were bombing and setting fires. I remember the shells. Flying in from Krakowskie Przedmieście and Bonifraterska. From the Vistula, too, most likely. And from Przejazd. We could sense that they were aiming at the line to the manhole and at the manhole itself.

We moved up. From the gate. Right into the street. Against the wall. Here it moved a bit more quickly. And we could already see people breaking away from the wall at the corner and crawling over the roadway to the manhole. But the entrance to the manhole — it was from the other side of the square. Facing the left tower of the church on Garnizonowa.

There was time for thinking — the emotional sort. No, don't think. No matter what.

"Oy," I thought, "they stayed back there on Miodowa, and those little crosses…"

Again we moved up a bit. Along the wall. It was becoming more and more dangerous.

"Ohhh," I thought, "over there are Halina, Father, Zocha. In Śródmieście."

Śródmieście! I had arranged to meet Halina at seven. On August

1. I would be there September 1. Also at seven. Since it was afternoon, I figured I would be there in two hours. And what about Mama? Where is my mother? Is she alive? I still have the keys. How did she get back to the apartment before they drove her out? How is Nanka? Sabina? Aunt Józia? Stefa?

Again a little way along the wall. Shells were landing. And those fires. Along the other side of Długa. Here. A fresh one. On Garnizonowa, too, I think. 13 or 15 Długa. Live flame. And yet the sun is shining here. Through the smoke. And flames. It's stinging. Everything.

"And I," I thought, more or less in these words, "who read with Mama long ago, long ago in peacetime about that 'Yon Valyon,' as people pronounced it, by Victor Hugo, who walked through the sewers of Paris with a wounded man on his back — now I, any minute now, in three minutes or so will enter the sewers of Warsaw with a wounded man on my back.[17] Who could have imagined it?"

But Śródmieście. So far away. Today perhaps it's hard to understand. Nowy Świat — Krasiński Square. Both are in Śródmieście. They're not so far apart. But they were terribly distant. No nearer, I tell you, than, for me, after the war, from Warsaw to Paris. In general, the two places weren't thought of as being in any way connected.

It was five in the afternoon when we broke away from the corner of the wall on Długa and the wall on Krasiński Square and immediately started crawling. Faster and faster. Because the shells were falling mercilessly. On us. On the entrance. The Miodowa barricade was fine. But the barricade across Krasiński Square, from Bonifraterska, was low — no higher than our waists. Made of gray paper sacks filled with something or other. Cement, most likely. And that barricade was important. Our defense. We were crawling beneath it. I was dragging the wounded man along the ground. With all my strength. Quickly. Quickly.

Across from the fire, from flames that were several stories high, in the sunshine, was the manhole. Someone was half squatting, half standing over the manhole. One or two people. And directing the traffic. Without pity he tore the bundles and knapsacks from people's backs and flung them aside onto a heap; they were piling up. Everything moved like lightning here. The shells were striking noticeably at the manhole itself. From two sides. The fire was raging. And engulfing things. We crawled along. Using all the strength we had. In front of us, behind us, too, was an unbroken line. The manhole wasn't big. The cover was thrown to one side. No one explained to anyone else what to do or how. Everyone learned as much as he could see in a second as the people ahead descended. I flung my wounded man over my back. No. He was handed to me somehow, I think. No. I

don't remember. With him, perhaps. Into that opening. The last view. The church on Garnizonowa. Burning. Smoke. Sun. Shells. And metal rungs. One foot. The other foot. Lower all the time. It was deep. It wasn't hard at all. Some number of those rungs. It widened out at the bottom. Like a bell. And we were entirely underground. Burbling. We set off at once. To the right. We'd already rolled up our trousers on Długa. We waded into something. Water halfway up our calves. We began to walk. In that water. so-called. Step after step: squish… squish… squish…

The first thing that startled me was the calm. The quiet. A burbling sound. Those steps. A light. A candle could be seen far ahead of us. Our nurse was also carrying a candle. So, calm. After that hell. Relief. Extraordinary relief. The wounded man didn't weigh me down at all. He was resting a bit from the effort. He was passive. Joy, almost. After that hell above. The bombs, the shells… far away. All that could be heard was: u-uu — uuu — uu — uu — u—drawn out, horribly drawn out, hollow — uu — uuu — that's the shells and the bombs; completely distant, indifferent — and the echo carried, carried.

I think we turned into Miodowa immediately. Because a whisper. From one person to another:

"We're walking under Miodowa."

"We're walking under Miodowa."

"We're walking under Miodowa."

And the whisper, too, could be heard in echoes, drawn out, as in a seashell. No. As in a well. That's not quite right, either. Because it wasn't just a bottomless well in cross-section. But something without beginning or end. And incalculable. Because it was branching. After all, there were as many sewers as there were streets. Another city. A third Warsaw, counting from the top. The first was the one right on the surface. The city of passages through courtyards and vestibules. The second was the city of shelters. With a system of connections. Underground. And beneath that underground Warsaw was this underground one. With traffic. Rules. Signs. At each fork, over the entrance into the sewer proper, or the Stare Miasto— Śródmieście pedestrian artery, was an arrow and the inscription "HERE" in chalk on the bricks.

What do sewers look like? Different in different places. Always shored up with bricks in their entirety. And they always have rounded ceilings and rounded floors. Or, rather, oval. In general, they appear to be cross-sections or, rather, to be seen in perspective, because their cross-section can be seen into infinity. Oval-shaped. More or less oval. I say more or less because right under Miodowa the sewer was large and had benches (concrete, I think) on both sides. We walked behind

a candle. The nurse. And ahead of us someone else was also carrying a candle. And someone even farther ahead, I think. So things could be seen. Obviously, not clearly. The walls shimmered. That perspective. The procession also without beginning or end shimmered. Flickered. In a slippery way. Because here everything was slippery. We had rolled up our trouser legs. To our knees. But we were wearing shoes. The water was always halfway up our calves. I don't remember if it stank. Or steamed. I don't even know what was in it. Probably various things. It seems we passed two corpses. Exactly twice, I think, something got tangled under my feet. But generally one didn't feel anything but slosh… slosh… and relief. That we're going to Śródmieście. It must have been an absolute hell in Stare Miasto if our eyes and noses were so deadened.

Not long ago someone asked me where the sewage was coming from then. Why was it still flowing?

I don't know.

Those concrete benches may have been for the workers to have something to walk on. After all, normally the sewage flows higher and more rapidly.

No one thought about that then. Benches are benches. Suddenly I noticed a discarded knapsack on the benches. Then, farther on, a jar of lard. Then again a knapsack. Or a blanket. I remind you — or myself, anyway — that I was carrying the wounded man. It was wide and high under Miodowa. So I was carrying him normally. We walked on and on under Miodowa. And it was shimmering. From those candles. And the people. And the thundering: u — uu — uuu…

Well, anyway I was exhausted by carrying him.

"Zbyszek," I turned only my head because we were walking, "could you take him now?"

"Fine."

Swen slowed down. Zbyszek passed him. He came up to me. And took him. I was free. I felt comfortable. As I rarely had.

I don't remember if this was first:

"Attention! Put out your lights, an open manhole."

"Attention! We're slowing down, we're passing under an open manhole."

"Attention… put out your lights… absolute silence… there are Germans overhead…"

Or perhaps the light coming from the opposite direction was first. From afar. But moving. In our direction. So that we grew uneasy, I think. Perhaps we even asked: "What's that?"

We, the uninitiated. Someone, a few people ahead of us, whispered immediately: "A courier."

"It's nothing, nothing," we passed it on, "a courier…"

“Aha — a courier.”

“A courier.”

“Attention… at-ten-tion…”

The light suddenly drew closer, moving swiftly, the splashing was also rapid.

“Attention, attention… a courier.”

She passed us with her candle.

Then again, “Attention, a manhole, we don’t know if it’s open.”

“Attention, a manhole…”

I remember that one of them wasn’t open. But we passed by more slowly, more quietly. At each one. During that month we had grown only too accustomed to silences, to the phrase “the Germans are listening,” and to pretending that suddenly we weren’t there.

I no longer remember those columns of light under the open manholes. Or perhaps I do remember. From far off they were like candles. The same effect. Something shining. Then again, something beginning to shine. It passed. In our direction.

“Attention… attention…”

This time it was a boy, I think. The girl courier passed us several times. Once, two people. Once, I think, even more.

We were amazed that it was still Miodowa. There was no fear of getting lost. Because there were lights and arrows. And people who knew the way. And the fact that there was no end to us. Ahead. And to the rear. At the corner of Nowy Świat and Warecka people had been exiting and exiting for a long time already. But they were still entering continuously on Krasiński Square. And for a long time they would keep on entering. We had hit upon a good time. Teik retreated with the last forces, at night already. They had to walk more quickly and in the dark. And they got lost. The Germans threw grenades in after them. From above. There was a panic. In the end they made it and got out. But not all of them.

At some point I took the wounded man again. He was already exhausted. And feverish. He wanted something to drink. He hurt all over. He was groaning. I comforted him. But what good did that do? He wanted something to drink. And nobody had any water. Not a drop. Nor was there any medicine for the pain. We had to carry him. Which means he had to be touched in many places. And how good it was that he was holding on to me around my neck as was needed. I held his legs with my hands.

After a long time the word started filtering back that we were turning into Krakowskie Przedmieście. And that it wouldn’t be as high or wide there. That is, that it wouldn’t be possible to walk as freely. This was especially distressing for me and for anyone who was carrying a wounded man. You became about a head taller. But after

all, I wasn't so very tall to start with.

We were all curious about this fork. This turn. This news.

"Krakowskie Przedmieście!"

"Krakowskie Przedmieście!"

"Krakowskie Przedmieście!"

Perhaps the first open manhole was really over here. Because Krakowskie Przedmieście was held by the Germans. But Miodowa, too, from Krakowskie Przedmieście to Kozia, was also theirs, I think, because they used to ride right up to the barricade near the Capuchins. And also because they were occupying that eight-story building on the corner of Kozia.

Finally we're there. At the fork. The important one. We turn right. The sewer becomes different immediately. Smaller. And oval-shaped. Without any benches. We all had to stoop a little. But it wasn't too bad. That is, we were definitely hunched over. I don't remember anymore just how much. Even before that the wounded man was beginning to weigh me down. Once again I took a break and gave him to someone else. To Zbyszek. Or to some other person. From Henio's section. Then I took the wounded man back. I held him by his knees, lower down. And he held his head lower. And he didn't stick up at all. Because his head didn't particularly want to stay upright. It kept flopping over. Until it fell. Onto the back of my head.

"Water," he groaned.

"But there isn't any water, there's nothing we can do, just a little longer, we'll get there soon…" That was me, trying to comfort him.

But he kept groaning. "Water… water…"

Again I explained it to him. A moment later he called out again, "Water… I can't stand it…"

"We'll be there soon, we'll be there soon…"

He began slipping even lower; his head bounced downwards and sideways.

At one point I wanted, I don't know if it was a manhole or if we had to slow down, or someone was passing us and it was more crowded so we had to stop. Well, I wanted to prop myself up a bit with my hand against the wall. I leaned on it. With my palm. And my palm slid down along the thick green ooze. It didn't even give way. I knew, after all, that it was half round and yet I was astonished that it was so thickly — overgrown — with whatever it was. Because I think practically my whole fist slid into it. And slid down. With the slime. "So leaning makes no difference," I thought, because for some reason I was still protecting my clothing. Oh, naiveté!

We moved on.

Slosh… slosh… slosh…

Buuuu — again the sounds of the uprising overhead: buuuu—

uuu — uuuuuu — uu…

“Waaater…”

“It won’t be long now… not long…”

“Waater… I can drink water from the sewer…”

“No!”

“I can drink… give me that water… from the sewer.”

“No, no.”

The nurse ahead of me heard him and also cried: “No, no!”

“I want to drink…”

He wanted to slip down even lower but he couldn’t manage.

“What should I do with him? What should I do?” I was becoming desperate.

“Just a minute.” The nurse opened her rucksack. “I’ll give him a sugar cube. I have some.”

“Oh, that’s great,” I said, “and that will help his thirst?”

“Yes, sugar helps, it dulls the thirst”—and she handed it to him—“here, it’s sugar, take it.”

“Good…” He opened his mouth, she placed the cube inside.

We walked on. For the time being there was some peace with him.

We walked for a long time. Under Krakowskie Przedmieście. Forks… The names of the streets in chalk, arrows: HERE! Passing. Standing still.

“Attention! Attention! Atten-tion! Manholes!”

“Silence! Extinguish lights!”—and again slowing our pace.

Noises from bombs, shells, from whatever, every so often, endless: bu-u-u-uu-uuu-uuuuu…

Someone again (a civilian) took the wounded man from me. Suddenly:

“Nowy Świat!”

“Nowy Świat!”

“Nowy Świat!”

“It won’t be long now…”

“Nowy Świat! We’ll soon be coming out, at the corner of Warecka!”

“Nowy Świat! The last stretch now, exit onto Warecka!”

I don’t remember now if there was anything distinctive about Nowy Świat. Perhaps it was even a little smaller. Or maybe not. Perhaps not. There definitely was a fork. We were definitely exhausted by then. And impatient. Although it was comforting that we had made it. Without grenades. And that we were walking under our own territory. I don’t remember in what words that was expressed. Toward the rear, behind me. But it was very much to the point.

I don’t think anyone told us the time yet. What time it was. I

don't know if that was deliberate. Because they did later. Shortly afterward. Near the exit. Not that they made an announcement. But the time was mentioned. Perhaps it only seems to me that we didn't talk about it since we'd been walking for so long. Or maybe not. The fact is that on the whole everyone was disoriented and even had we not been disoriented it would have been hard to believe that several hours had passed already. I know for a fact that before we reached the exit there was great excitement. Because it was ten o'clock. Or even past ten. At night. Even perhaps half past ten. Yes. Definitely. No earlier. Because someone said that we'd been walking for five hours. And after all, we'd entered the sewer at five o'clock. There was sunshine. Heat.

I know that I took the wounded man back from Zbyszek or the other person onto my own back. He was at the end of his rope and I don't remember anymore if he was groaning nonstop. Or if he was already quiet. And utterly indifferent. Maybe both. By turns.

At one moment the cry went up:

"Stand still! Stand still! Stand still! We'll be exiting in order. Pass it on!"

"Stand still! Stand still! Stand still! Pass it on!"

"Stand still! We'll be exiting in order…"

We stood still. Henio and the nurse chatted with us. Radosław told us, "The entire 'Parasol' group is exiting ahead of us. Two hundred people."

We stood there. Rather far from the manhole. People were exiting, but we couldn't see anything. Or even hear anything. Because we ourselves were chattering. As were the people in back of us. After all, we were still too far from the head of the line. It dragged on and on. The wounded man was groaning. He lost consciousness. By now, it was hard for me, too. Difficult. What did my clothing matter now? I leaned against the wall along with him, just as I was. It didn't make any difference to him. Or to me, either. But since the wall was rounded, concave, I bent into a convex shape. I felt as if I were being sucked in. A chill was out of the question that summer. The dampness — that was a trifle. And the slime — also the same by then. It was a good thing that I didn't slide all the way down on my back. The wounded man hung across me. And kept on groaning. I hunched over, too. Other people were standing facing each other, back to back, side by side, in groups; I think several others also leaned. Perhaps once we slid forward several steps. Certainly. Once. And again. Because a commotion, a row, could already be heard from up ahead, people figuring out (as it turned out) some technical equipment problems.

Henio or the nurse whispered to us confidentially, "They have a large number of wounded… that's why it's taking them so long…

because they're carrying them on stretchers."

So that's what it was all about. A lot of wounded. Only now did they stop concealing it. So mine was not an exception.

Everyone felt guilty about those left behind. Not so much about the civilians. Obviously, the young men posed a special problem. After all, as I've said, they turned a blind eye when someone inserted himself into the sewer. But those partisans? The seriously wounded? Much worse. Because they wore uniforms. And were there en masse. And were helpless. What would happen to them? We deceived ourselves that… yes, somehow, anyway… And then it turned out. What. How. Horrible. Others have described it already. I won't repeat it. Only to say that what happened in Wola happened again.[18]

We stood there for a long time. Getting closer and closer to the exit and the uproar. We could already see something. Movement upwards. But I was still leaning against the green wall all the time with the wounded man. Now I didn't care at all in how many places my jacket would have to be cleaned. Not at all; just so I didn't slide down the wall.

All told, we spent approximately two hours standing under that manhole. Then, once it was the turn of the healthy — the ones from "Parasol" and the others who were ahead of us, it went quickly. Expeditiously. We were even driven out. After all, there were those others behind us. And the people behind us were stretched out to Krasiński Square. The entire sewer was packed with people.

Unexpectedly they started shouting:

"Move out, move out, forward!"

"Get out, it's our turn!"

"Attention! Now it's our turn! Get out, get out!"

"Attention! It's our turn now!"

I remember that at first they pulled and shoved up a stretcher, I think, with something on it or someone. Then Radosław. Then Henio. Then the nurse. Then me. Up the rungs. I ordered the wounded man to hold tight. With his arms and legs. I grabbed onto that spiral. Higher and higher. Maybe someone pushed me. Zbyszek or the other helper. They and Swen came out behind me. I know that at one point I caught the smell of fresh air. Of night. I noticed the stars. And someone quickly grabbed me by the arms.

"No, no, I'll do it myself!"

"You have no strength left…"

I didn't. I submitted. They pulled me out to the surface. I don't know when. Quickly. Because of that corner. Buildings. A barricade. Śródmieście. Consciousness. Odors. Dizziness. The wounded man. Mine. He was already on a stretcher. Two women were walking off with him. Nurses from Śródmieście. Toward Warecka.

“I’ll carry him.” I grabbed at the stretcher.

“No, no. That’s our responsibility now.”

That’s literally how they answered me. And they were off. The stretcher creaked. Swayed. I walked after them for a moment. Swen was behind me. And Zbyszek. Many stretchers were being carried. Ahead of us. And no doubt behind us, too. I don’t know what happened to Henio. I only remember myself. It was quiet. For the most part. The barricades. Narrow Warecka Street. I walked. We walked. Emotionally drained. Unglued.

Buildings? In one piece? Halina! Father! Śródmieście! Ohhh!

We entered number 12. By chance. A large courtyard. There was sky here. And stars, I think. Distinct. The three of us. We sat down on a step. Poured water out of our shoes. Tidied ourselves. Rolled down our pants legs. Everything in good faith. And a little for comfort. And the rest — that was to make a good impression. Śródmieście. Still standing. Living buildings with living people. Not burning. There is even silence. Maybe something. But compared with what I remembered then it was completely silent. Halina! Father! Sky. A good smell. Night.

“Let’s go.”

We jumped up, one-two-three. The gate. Warecka. The square. Szpitalna. Familiar. So familiar. Indeed. We walked freely and quickly.

A corner.

Chmielna. Everything is standing.

We turn.

Into Marszałkowska.

The only thing is that it’s dark. Barricades. That atmosphere. But otherwise it’s normal. Houses. Night. Peace. Midnight. Summer. Warm.

Everything is there.

32 Chmielna.

“It’s standing!”

We go inside. The gate. The courtyard. We drop in at the janitor’s.

“Is Pani Rybińska at home? She is? Yes?”

“Yes, yes, they’re here…”

“In which cellar?” we ask.

“Cellar?” The janitor is surprised. “They’re upstairs in their apartment. They’re sleeping.”

Now that was a shock.

“Upstairs?”

“Yes… In their apartment.”

We thank him… start upstairs…

“Are you gentlemen from Starówka?”

“Yes, straight from the sewer.”

The janitor ran into the center of the courtyard and shouted at the windows: “Pan Białoszewskiiii! Pan Białoszewskiiiiii! Your son’s come back from Starówka!”

Father shouted something back from the fourth floor. There was a commotion. Immediately. Thudding on the stairs.

We also ran up the stairs. Quick as we could. I think it was on the third floor. That we ran into Father. I noticed an open door one flight up. And Zocha running out onto the stairs.

“Miron! Swen!”

“This is Swen’s cousin.” I introduced Zbyszek. “We came here for the time being… to you… from Starówka… through the sewers…”

“Of course, come in, come in…”

They lead us in, sit us down, offer stools, chairs.

“I’ll give something to eat in a minute. Do you want to wash up? You look a mess!”

Stacha, Halina’s mother, wakes up. And Halina. In beds. We rush to them. In the dark I bend over Halina. I am the one from the sewers; she, the one under the quilt, is clean. I kiss her.

“We were supposed to see each other August 1,” I say. “Well, it’s exactly one month later.”

Halina is sleepy; she looks around.

“My God, you look awful, your hair is glued down. Zocha, he’s got to change his clothing. Swen, you look awful!”

Each of us was given a change of clothing. I think we undressed on the staircase. Then we took turns washing up in the anteroom. There was bustling, fussing, rising, chatting, boiling water, food. Everything in a rush.

At that moment we were happy. We talked without interruption. Together. All three of us. They did, too.

It took us two hours to wash. However, I think we ate something first. Then to the basins. Hot water. Our hair took the longest time. It didn’t want to come unglued. They helped us.

“Clothing into the fire.”

“Yes, right into the fire,” Zocha and Father decided for me. And flung it into the stove. My shoes, too. Everything I had on. Then mainly eating. Then bedding was laid out. After all, it was a big change for such a small apartment. Still more talk… And suddenly — sleep.

We wake up in the morning. Hungry. Halina is already preparing three bowls of buttered macaroni for us. She serves it. We eat.

“I’ll make something else for you right away. Zenek is at the Home Army. Downtown. Zocha’s at the barracks. She’s in charge of the kitchen.” (Zenek is my father.)

Again we eat something. Full bowls. Buttered. Something’s

rustling. The janitor? Sweeping up? We look out the window. Yes.

Halina cooked and served us something again. Every hour, every hour and a half. Only now was Stare Miasto beginning to get out of us.

For the time being neither Starówka, nor the sewers, nor Śródmieście seemed real. Nothing did. Everything was unreal. All we wanted was to eat. Various surprises. Halina. Ourselves. And that feeling of peace and happiness. If only for an hour. But perhaps it would last till the end of the day. And through the night. Until morning.

I don't remember if anything happened. I think it was then, on the first day, that Halina said at one point, "We'd better go down to the cellar."

But it wasn't anything terrifying. And it didn't last long. It was summer all the time, hot. September 2. Saturday. Like five years ago. In 1939. The artillery in the afternoon. Halina explained.

"They begin around this time. We know what streets because they're at an angle. Now it's Złota and Zgoda. Over there, beyond Marszałkowska, they're worse off."

I think it was that first day already that Halina and I decided to continue our French studies. Halina pulled out Gide's *La Symphonie pastorale*. In French. We read through the entire first page with enthusiasm. Which wasn't easy. Because it was dense. And we had to check many words in the dictionary. And even so we couldn't find the right meaning every time.

Father said that here in Śródmieście you absolutely had to know the passwords and responses, which were changed every day. For protection against the "pigeon fanciers." They checked papers in the evening after dark. There was a curfew. They had so-called detention of pedestrians (to avoid calling them "roundups"). For public works. For digging, hammering, barricades. The headquarters of the Home Army was here, on the corner of Świętokrzyska and Marszałkowska, in the General Savings Association building. For the time being, at least in the central and southern districts of Śródmieście, it was so-so, or rather, the defense was continuing and so was public order. Father said that in light of this he could try to get us work somewhere. Because here you had to work at something. Work was obligatory.

On that foolish day of joy everything both amazed us and didn't. It wasn't that we were afraid of work. We had grown accustomed to it. What hadn't we grown accustomed to? But it seems we had, under our sweetened mood, a great uncertainty about it all. Even a negative certainty. But for the time being, if that's how things were, that's how they'd have to be.

And so we were already talking among ourselves about joining the uprising.

“I’ve thought about it,” said Halina.

“But really,” I said, “if you want to we can join, it really doesn’t make any difference.”

Halina said that by now it didn’t make any difference to her, either.

And that’s the way we left it. Provisionally. As it turned out, they weren’t accepting volunteers anyway or else they were accepting them but unenthusiastically because there were no weapons. Besides which, it was necessary to be trained.

I think it was still on that same day that after several meals Zocha ordered us to come to her barracks for a meal. Nearby. The corner of Chmielna and Zgoda. The building is still standing today. A cake, a piece of cake, six stories high, with a little triangle in the center at the base (a so-called courtyard).

Zocha’s quarters, or rather the quarters of the division for which she cooked, was in the Bałtarowiczes’ apartment. Zocha was called Pani Zula there. She wore sneakers and had a turban on her head.

She sat us down at the table. She gave us each a plate of macaroni. In addition, she set out a jar of lard. With cracklings. And some juice. Also in jars, I think.

Somehow, Swen simultaneously greased his own food and mine. With a spoonful of lard. Then again.

“Have some more.” Another spoonful for each of us.

“Have some more.” Again another spoonful.

And he grabbed for the juice. Raspberry. No. Cherry, I think. He poured it onto the lard, the macaroni. I yelled something. But he poured on even more. We began wolfing it down immediately. And quickly. With great appetite. I confess. With appreciation for everything in that whole mess.

Our first gorging ended with this, I think. It was already dark. I remember that afterward Father took us to Uncle Stefan’s. The typesetter. On Górski Street. To the newspaper plant. It was a sweet warm evening. As in 1939. Just the same, September 2. Saturday. A sweetened peace, warm. Dark. The same Szpitalna and Chmielna Streets. Mama and I. We had walked from Napoleon Square to Jędrzejewski’s to buy some cake. Because he had good, large cakes. There was a front, too. Which could be heard. False happiness. Delusion through physical well-being.

In the printing shop there were many lights, people, the smell of the newssheets, the type, papers, piles, people bending over, tapping sounds. In addition, the radio was on. Tuned in to Lublin. Wanda Wasilewska was speaking.[19] To Warsaw about Warsaw. It was taken somewhat strangely. Because she spoke strangely.

Uncle Stefan was setting type, I think. And it seems he was

snacking off a piece of paper. He told me (because I asked him) how Aunt Natka, Krysia, and Bogusia were (because, after all, they weren't on Towarowa near the railway, though that's where they lived).

"No, they're at Marycha's on Miedziana Street. It's terrible there."

I understood that everything was finished over there, that on August 26 or 27 there had been air raids, it seems, just as in Stare Miasto. They had survived. They didn't know that they still had Dresden ahead of them, because they were deported there after the uprising.

It wasn't only on the other side of Marszałkowska that the situation was terrible. It was also becoming terrible beyond Nowy Świat. Beyond the Saxon Gardens there were only ruins and empty lots. The front passed through the Saxon Gardens. So only that chosen belt remained intact, one-third of Śródmieście, at most. A semblance of order. With the headquarters of the Home Army. The five-minute "Śródmieście Republic." But even here, to be sure, there was more than one peculiar incident.

I have already told how the Hitlerites attacked 18 Bracka Street behind their tanks and slaughtered who knows how many people there. Then the same thing happened on Jasna Street. Also raids, and Big Berthas, and other things. Once, Father was walking along Zgoda Street and someone was playing a piano. Suddenly — planes. Immediately, bombs. Half of the house disappeared. The person upstairs was cut off. The staircases had collapsed. Luckily a truck came. Firemen. They got him down with a ladder.

It wasn't for nothing that people in Śródmieście sang to the tune of an old rumba:

The tanks along Marszałkowska
The tanks along Nowy Świat…

The huge General Savings Association building itself (headquarters) was already scarred. But it was standing, more or less. Mighty. Concrete. So many stories high. People were staying there. Father went to see his acquaintance, Major Brejdygand. To get him out of there. Major Brejdygand replied, "No, it's just fine here…"

The next day, in the morning, Father went to see him again. He found the building in ruins. Major Brejdygand had perished. They had bombed through to the cellars, two floors down, I think. The concrete hadn't helped.

I know from Janek Markiewicz's mother that she and Janek had a wounded friend there. He had to be carried out. They got hold of a stretcher; they rushed about looking for him but he couldn't be found. They called to him. No answer. Plenty of wounded people. In water. And the water was rising. Because something had burst. The wounded were crawling about but they didn't have any strength. They went on

looking for their own. Finally, a weak little voice: “Here I am…”

They look: a mummy wrapped up in bandages. They put him on the stretcher. They carried him out. Others were shouting: “And when will we get out? When will you get us out?”

“ ‘We’ll come back for you,’ I shouted,” Markiewicz’s mother told me. “I had to lie to them. It was horrible. We carried that poor thing. We carried him. It was getting too heavy for me. Around Sienkiewicz Street I stumbled with the stretcher and began to shriek. Janek yelled at me, ‘What are you trembling for, you hysterical woman!’ But I didn’t say anything; I only lay there and screamed, ‘He-ee-elp…!’ ”

“And so?” I asked, laughing. “Did it help?”

“You won’t believe it, but it did. Suddenly someone ran up. Wearing a uniform. He and Janek carried the stretcher. Finally he saluted and walked away. And he was that Yugoslav who took part in our uprising.”

All that took place right at the beginning of September. Back in August Father had been asked to find a postman. His address: some number on Śliska Street. Father went there; the old man was sitting in his kitchen with his sister. Father told us:

“I say they should leave but they say no, no… I come back several days later. They’re no longer there. They’re sitting in the cellar. But do you know how? Under the courtyard. They dug corridors under the entire house and under the yard in a square. And people were sitting there on benches along both sides, crowded together, one next to the other, without any space. Again I try to persuade him but again he says, ‘No… my sister and I will stay right here!’ Just as I was going back to them for the last time I was thrown against the wall in the building housing the Capitol movie theater; I was thrown against the wall, fell through into the basement, and then the main wall began to collapse because they had obviously struck behind the wall and broken through into the basement… Then we just stood like that, everyone without moving, and everyone was holding on to his head to protect it. And when I reached Śliska Street I learned that everyone in those corridors under the walls was killed.”

After telling us about the famous battles in the Telephone Exchange (that layer cake with the Germans and Poles on alternating floors) and in the Church of the Holy Cross where, it seems, the Germans were on the roof of the church proper and the Poles in the choir with the organ and they even tore out the pipes in order to hurl them, Father and Halina told us about one youth who sat for days in the tram on Marszałkowska somewhere near Złota and whenever a tank approached he threw bottles at it; it seems he destroyed several tanks like that but finally he was killed, too.

What amazed me even more was that Woytowicz had organized a

Chopin concert in a café on the ground floor on Nowy Świat.[20] For the partisans. It was evening. The artillery fire began. Woytowicz was playing the "Revolutionary Étude" when the shells began to whistle and hit Nowy Świat. Right nearby. Woytowicz didn't stop. No one moved. Only the cups and saucers tumbled down and were broken. Irena P. told me about it when everything was over.

Halina said that there were concerts in the conservatory. And in the Apollo movie theater nearby a film was being shown. A documentary. Of the battles in the Church of the Holy Cross. She saw it herself. She told me about it then.

But let's return to the situation at 32 Chmielna, on the fourth floor. I don't remember anymore how we slept. After all, there were seven of us and yet it seems we were comfortable. From the beginning Zocha showed a great partiality for Zbyszek, which Swen made fun of.

On September 3 it was already hot in the morning. Sunday. It felt exceptionally holy. Food. Sitting around. Family. On a couch. And peace. As then. In 1939. Also September 3. Also Sunday. Suddenly the bombing had ceased. Heat. People were rushing from embassy to embassy, carrying manifestoes, because England and France had declared war. On Nowy Świat, near the statue of Copernicus, I had stumbled across a group of people singing "La Marseillaise" in French. A woman standing on the roof of a limousine was leading them, her black hair combed to look wet and sleek, and shaking her large earrings. I asked someone who she was. He said she was the wife of Prime Minister Sławoj-Składkowski.

So today, September 3, 1944, I organized a reading. Of a narrative poem. On a totally unrelated theme. Written on Rybaki Street. And also of a play I'd begun writing about the uprising. With a scene in the shelter on Rybaki. The play was written on the paper I'd taken from the cabinet at 5 Podwale, where that wooden well was. During my "author's afternoon" the four of us — Halina, Swen, Zbyszek, and I — sat on the couch. I was certain that the day would be peaceful until nightfall. And it was, more or less.

I don't know what started first, the bombing or the major diarrhea. I know that Swen started first. Running up and down. To the exit into the courtyard. From the fourth floor. He kept making a dash for it. Diarrhea and vomiting. A lot. Both the one and the other. I suspect that it hit him toward the end of that last (holy) Sunday. I started, I think, on Monday. In the morning. That fair weather. Familiar. Heat. The burning of garbage in a rubbish bin. Shared by 32 Chmielna and the Palladium theater because we had a common wall with a hole in it. And they had water. We didn't. On the other hand, we had corpses lying in our courtyard. Since Saturday. And the rags from those corpses, assorted bloodied cloaks, hung on the outhouse

door handle. So it wasn't pleasant for us when the runs started. And somehow the bombardment also started suddenly. On Monday.

Father says that we lay in our beds then, after our trip through the sewers, for almost three whole days. But it was neither three days nor a complete rest that we had right after Starówka. After all, I have described our first two days. All that walking around. I can recall that we set up camp beds on Monday, September 4—the third day. But because we had to keep running downstairs Swen and I couldn't lie in bed as one normally would have. After all, not only did we have the vomiting and diarrhea but there was the bombing, too.

I have already mentioned that there was one crowded room and a sort of small anteroom and there were so many of us. In addition, two small cats. One black, the other white. Halina adored cats. I did, too. Swen (because people can be divided into dog-lovers and cat-lovers) preferred dogs. But he also liked cats. Take my father. He has raised animals all his life and is patient with them. As few people are. In general, he has a peaceful temperament. He wishes life, the world, and people well. He likes to be active. He made rubber stamps during the occupation. He forged signatures. German ones. On glass. Under the glass was a light. He was excellent at it. At night. And by day he'd go with those *Ausweise* (and what large quantities he had!) to the Industrial-Commercial — and — Handicrafts Hall. On Wiejska at the corner of Senacka. There he worked on the janitor. Not really the janitor — because the janitor was already ours— but through the janitor he'd get the "canary," the SA guard, really stewed. It was a question of having easier access to the boss's office at any time. The boss was in charge of affixing the crows, that is, the Hitlerite rooks. À la Roman eagles. The boss was a woman. She was sweet on the janitor because he was young. And when she went out to dinner she didn't lock her office, leaving it in the janitor's care. During this time the janitor would position his drunken "canary," enter the office, open the cabinet containing the stamps with a specially made key, and quickly stamp the "crows" on whatever Father and other people handed him. But it was still necessary to stand in line at the window for signatures. One waited and waited, as for everything else then. There was yet another complication. A person could sign for only one *Ausweis*. So Father would take Zocha, Halina, sometimes me, and whoever else turned up. In that way, four or five *Ausweise* could be obtained. But on the next day the so-called "Cherman" might recognize them. So Zocha would disguise herself. Zocha especially. She'd wear glasses. Put on mourning. Lisp. She became expert at it.

I remember Father in 1940. When the roundups began. Our window on the corner of Leszno and Wronia Streets was on the fifth floor and looked out on the entire length of Leszno. For part of the

evening canvas-covered trucks drove past on Leszno. In the direction of Pawiak Prison. They flashed by, one after the other, cutting across Leszno. They were the typical roundup vans, packed with people and soon to be so familiar. Father was standing by the window. In his underwear. Looking out at Leszno. We had gone to sleep long before, the street had already quieted down, but Father still stood there and watched.

On the first day of the uprising, because he was a postman before the war, he rushed off to liberate the main post office. Then he organized a foray to get sugar for the partisans. The sugar was on Ciepła Street. Near Ceglana. Father drafted twenty civilians. Chance passersby. He announced that it would be shared fifty-fifty. Between the troops. And them. They ran to Ceglana Street. But since there were already Germans in part of that depot they brought an escort. Three fifteen-year-olds armed with grenades overwhelmed the Germans from the rear. They wiped them out one-two-three. Then they had to start loading. Father urged them to be quick about it. Not to be greedy. Because it turned out that there were many other tempting foods in addition to the sugar. Vodka, too. Slivovitz. They drank some. Took some for later. But there was that sugar. And other delicacies, too. And the trip back. Father also brought back a large amount of sugar. A whole sack. Cubes. I remember the sack. Synthetic material, so thin it was like netting. That sugar was important later on, on the other side of Aleje Jerozolimskie.

I don't remember the precise date when we fled to the other side of Aleje. Around that time, on Monday, September 4, Father, Swen, and I were at the intersection of Chmielna, Bracka, and Zgoda Streets. Or perhaps even closer to Nowy Świat. Suddenly we noticed people running in confusion and screaming:

"Powiśle's been bombed!"

"Powiśle's done for!"

"The Germans are on Powiśle!"

They had fled, no doubt, in whatever they had on. With nothing. Some of them, with bits of rubble in their hair. They were running over from Ordynacka and Foksal Streets. I questioned them. While running. Just like those people who had fled down Chłodna Street first toward Wola and then away from Wola.

Immediately afterward bombings and panic set in near us, too. And then the diarrhea and vomiting. And those corpses which were buried later at the rear of the Palladium. And the burning of garbage and refuse. Everywhere.

"Burn! Burn it! It's infectious!"

The air was full of smoke. Panic. Rushing about.

At the beginning we didn't run down. Because of those four

flights of stairs. Three to the ground floor and the fourth to the cellar. But what with the diarrhea and the vomiting we were forced to keep running down anyway. We wanted to lie still all the time. I remember how all day long mobs of people were rushing through our building to the Palladium on Złota and from the Palladium to Chmielna. Without a stop. In both directions. At the bottom of our stairwell, in the middle of the hall which the route actually intersected, were half-glass swinging doors. Those doors were constantly in motion and squeaked and banged against the wall. I don't remember if the first time it was through the window and the second time through those doors, or vice versa, that I saw two women dragging a man by his arms. His cheek was torn off. Hanging, that is. They rushed into our corridor at a trot. In the direction of Chmielna. The doors were swinging nonstop. And then those same people came back, still at a trot. But the man had his cheek sewn on already. I don't remember if I saw that it was sewn on or if it was bandaged. But later on, still during the uprising, I was amazed that he had his cheek. It was scarred but he had it. Because I passed him. And I met him after the war, too. And his cheek had become normal. But at the time he'd looked terrifying.

Well, we didn't rush downstairs at the beginning. Swen. Zbyszek. And I. Halina, too. (Father and Zocha were downtown, but Stacha — Halina's mother — went down to the shelter immediately.) But they kept on bombing Złota, Chmielna, Zgoda, Jasna, Moniuszko, Sienkiewicz. The house was shaking. There was no reason to wait. Not a minute. We went down. Because there were shells, too. In addition. And the cows.

"The cow is bellowing," people said here in Śródmieście, just as in Starówka they said about the same thing, "They're winding up the wardrobe."

The cellar. Or rather, cellars. Square. With passages branching off from them. They were narrow. Some benches for the older people. Temporarily. Right against the walls. The rest stood. Also against the walls. And we did, too. Near the entrance. Side by side. In a row. One beside the other. I felt unhappy that it had come so soon. Once more I experienced an acceptance of death. It was only a question of how.

Halina said, "I think it would be best to hold each other's hands."

After the second run downstairs that day we stood against the wall and held each other's hands. They were bombing fiercely. It had begun suddenly after that idyll, but in the familiar way. There was a lot of dive-bombing and explosions. Shock waves. Pieces broken off. Running about. Stamping. Calling. News. So bad. That… That… That right here… On Chmielna, too. And on Złota. And all over. First one place was destroyed. Then another. Digging out the buried. Fires. Right away. Familiar. Familiar. Familiar. But the exhaustion — despite

acceptance — the third time… The third time? The same thing? Oh God…

At that time we started running farther away for water. Next door, in the Palladium, there was no more water. Something had crashed, most likely. Into something. So we ran down Chmielna Street. Past the tiny square on Zgoda at the corner of Bracka and Szpitalna. Through the gate. To some building. Or perhaps through a gate along that stretch. I don't remember anymore. I do remember that it was crowded with people standing in a line there; already on Chmielna it was four times larger, and it went through the gate, the courtyards and out to Widok, across Widok to a gate, a courtyard, and a passageway (complicated, underground) leading beyond Aleje. There was a crush. Beyond Aleje. Wawa was standing there, too, I remember. In a hat. A parodist. A singer. With a pocketbook under her arm. With violet false eyelashes pasted on her lids. On those high heels of hers. I don't want to offend her, but she is fat and she knows it, and:

"That's the kind you really like," and here she poured a glass of water on a certain gentleman at Hania's (with a somewhat belated squeal). Then she was sorry, apologized. But that was in 1950.

We didn't know Wawa then. Personally. By sight, from what we'd heard of her, from her performances — yes. Who didn't know her? Swen tells how in those days he was rushing somewhere through the cellars into that crowd, all squashed together, rushing about. Wawa was in the crowd, wearing her hat. Swen ran up to her: "Miss Wawa!"

"Oh?" she replied.

"Hello!"

"Hello, sir."

"You're here?"

"Oh!"

For now, through those gates. On Chmielna. We ran past with clanking buckets. For water. Other people were also waiting there for it. But Father and Zocha had Home Army armbands. To tell the truth, yesterday evening, or maybe it was two days ago, Father hid when they came to look for him. He was needed for something. That was probably the night when we arrived from Starówka. Or maybe September 2. After Uncle Stefan. The printing shop. And the lard and cherries. Father wasn't such a shirker. I've already written. That he rushed about. Did things. But at times — nothing doing. It's necessary. According to someone. But he thinks that he has his own affairs. For buckets it was effective. Allowed through immediately. If some of the women, or civilians, made a stink about it, oh well, they're always complaining anyway. There was water in three-quarters of an hour, at most. In the house. Upstairs. In our cubicle.

Maybe we were already at the Bałturowiczes'. (After the night of the fourth to fifth, probably the last night at Zocha's, 32 Chmielna.) That is, in our quarters. Actually, we had our own room. The six of us. Because here the second floor was in the thick triangle and five other floors. Plus the Klein vaulting. And over there — it was unsafe. At 32 Chmielna. So perhaps we had partially moved to the corner of Chmielna and Zgoda. I think so. It was either the sixth or seventh. Of September. Wednesday — Thursday. Because that's how we were living here. We spent the night, we ate. At times we looked in at 32 Chmielna, but less frequently with each passing day. Because it was getting worse all the time. They were shelling. Feeling their way along a line. Now Złota, now Jasna, now Sienkiewicz Street. Everyone knows this. Which streets when. Yes, but in the daytime. The sky. Dreadful. A lot. A lot. Often. Buu-uu-u. Planes. Like a toothache. And fine weather. Heat. Sky-blue. But here it's gray! And…

uu-uu-uu-uu-uu…

voooom-uu-u…

vroooooooom-uuu — crash!

vrooooo-uuu… crash!

After days. Three. Of major diarrhea. And major vomiting. We raced around. Because why sit and sit (since the runs had stopped). In our quarters on the corner of Zgoda. Although it wasn't bad here. Because we were among family. And Halina was there. And that room which was almost ours. Zocha was caught up in her duties. A friend of the family. Excited by her own energy. She cooks. She boils. Pours from a ladle. Tops up. Wearing her turban and sneakers all the time. She chatters, tells us stories, tells them to her men from the Home Army.

She liked to address one of them "Hey you, Gloomy," because that was his code name. Like Teik — the Talon. Roman Ż.—Athos. Lech — Efazy. I've forgotten Father's.

Once, I'm moving along at a trot, running. Down Chmielna Street. People and more people. To the gate. On Przechodnia. Past Aleje. The line had grown even longer. And was still growing. Snaking. Day — night. Well, I'm walking along. Then bombs from, I think, the Jasna — Moniuszko — Złota line. They're coming in at us, thicker and thicker. From Powiśle, too. And from behind Marszałkowska. And now: wheeeeee… cows.

I dash into a huge building — a colossus — a wardrobe — seven stories high — bowed — bay windows — Chmielna… To the right of the gate, stairs. Already crash, crash. Somewhere here. And wheeeeee… crash. And the next, and again. There's no time. These are the only stairs. On the right. And only leading up. So I run upstairs. Gates were considered among the worst places to be (in relation to the

cows). And these gates were the real thing. Typical. Into a barrel. (Defensive?) With a threshold, a grate. Made of iron. Set into niches at the entry. And also often with little iron figures of haystacks or Saint Nicholases on either side.

From the stairs — stopping one and a half flights up, on a landing with a window looking into a tiny courtyard. Very small. I see. It. Yes. But I also see something I never would have expected (the elegant-conditional mood, conditionally courteous, typically Varsovian). Well, suddenly against the background of the rear of a second building there was a little detached building, a tiny one-and-a-half-story palace; on the building, a hanging garden with tiny paths, covered with flowers. Paving stones, little sidewalks, balustrades. And trees. Lilacs, I think. With leaves strewn about gray and brick-red. With a fresh sprinkling on top.

That was a shock. Extraordinary. Like the cathedral with the statues, the rear of the Radziwiłł gardens (on an island today), the Four Winds on burnt-out Długa Street.

Another time Swen and I were walking along Zgoda and Złota Streets. Opposite the Bank Under the Eagles there's a sign for a toilet. It was on Złota at number 5, I think. We barge in. A long courtyard. At the end, in the vicinity of a low wall that has been broken through to the next property — a latrine. Public. One of many. Perches. Made of poles, sticks. Extremely long. Over long trenches. For those piles. And on them? Like chickens. In trousers. Dropped. Dangling. Various people. And among them was Wojciech Bąk.[21] Whom we knew from his poems, his slim volumes. A friend had pointed him out to me. Once. That he was here. During the war. In Warsaw. They'd deported him from Poznań. So he was here. He was waiting. For this moment on a perch. In the danger and the smoke. I saw him wandering about somewhere else, too. Well — as it turned out — he survived everything.

From the latrines you could slip into 32 Chmielna through holes in the wall. As for those corpses, once their rags had been burned they were buried. In the Palladium. You could see the fresh graves from the fourth floor. Next to them was a constantly smoking pile of garbage. And next to it, another latrine.

As for the Bank Under the Eagles… Well, every now and then we went out to Zgoda Street from our lodgings. Halina and I, for example. We go outside. We look at the bank and fantasize aloud that if it has to burn (and it definitely has to) then may it happen before our eyes. Because it will be a sight to see. Six mighty stories. The walls with their metal fixtures, black. In general, the entire edifice is black (it was then). And there were two eagles, one at each corner. Crouching. As if poised to take off. Looking at the roofs and somewhat downward.

Consequently, everything below them was transformed into cliffs.

Halina and I go outside once more. In front of our triangular fortress, the one in which we are staying. Suddenly we hear a shell. Boom! And the eagles are already above a totally occupied abyss. And how! In an instant. Live fire. Six stories high. Hardly a wisp of smoke. But flames are rising from the ground floor right up to the eagles. No one does anything, extinguishes anything. What could be done? So it blazed. But the walls remained standing. Nowadays, who would even imagine something like that?

The panic was worsening. More and more people were crowding behind Aleje. As if salvation were expected over there. Simply, in conformity with a law I already understood at that time, people had to change their locations and decide that one place was better, another worse. And since there was very little territory left to divide, Aleje became the demarcation line.

Naturally, there seemed to be a reason for it. Because in the evening of the sixth, I think, when Father, Zocha, and I made a foray to the other side (by a speeded-up method, thanks to the Home Army armbands), it appeared that for the time being it wasn't all that bad over there. I can't recall where on the other side of Aleje or to whom we were running. Just that general impression. And the fact that we were succumbing to an ever greater need to flee from here. At that time, on the evening of September 6, or perhaps it was the night of the fifth to sixth, we made serious preparations. On that last evening in our quarters we sat around the table and began to eat. There was still a lot of food of various kinds. And as often perversely happens, a solemn mood arose from our readiness and anxiety. As at a feast. Because we were eating, eating, even drinking a little, and then to top it off Zocha gave each of us candies wrapped in shiny paper. She gave Zbyszek an extra piece. But then she immediately gave me another one. I don't remember if she gave one to Swen. In any event, Halina. Suddenly. Got up from the table and walked out. Into the other room. Which was dark and empty. I go to see what's the matter. She's standing in the space behind the door, leaning against the door, and crying. I ask her, What's the matter? She keeps on crying. I comfort her, kiss her head, because I felt stupid, but she cries even harder. (When I asked her about this recently, she didn't remember it at all and anyway — why should she?)

After supper we decided to remain there after all. But only until morning, I think. Not long before, we'd had another plan. Father and Swen ran through those blocked gates into Widok and began looking for lodging there. I didn't have the faintest idea why they were looking on Widok Street. Not only did they arrange with a woman there for us to move in immediately but somehow Swen also spoke

with her about art and they both agreed that we would organize an artistic evening there that very night. The plan was quickly changed because bombs fell directly on Widok. And perhaps I was there with them after supper. To see whether the place would still do (because the bombs had fallen next door). Or perhaps we didn't cross under Aleje at all and I'm just confused. Maybe so.

There was the moon. It was late, past midnight. Warm. A full moon. Loaded down with suitcases, sacks (I was carrying on my back a paper sack filled with lumps of sugar from Ciepła), this time in utter seriousness we joined the crowd on the track. Naturally not the slow and terribly large crowd, but a smaller, quicker one that had passes. Halina and Zocha were lugging suitcases, because they couldn't do without several changes of underwear. Halina was walking along with an uneasy conscience because she had left both cats upstairs. It's true we had prepared a great deal of food and drink for them and had left the window open — as I have already mentioned— but even so, we felt uncomfortable about it. We wandered along in the noise of the moving crowd with strange and fragmented feelings. The moon was shining. We passed courtyards (with busts of Chopin and Mickiewicz) that to this day serve as a passageway farther along, adorned with those same busts. There came a time when we had to yield our privilege (or our arrogance) and join the crowd such as it was. And it was already a single crowd, squashed together and moving forward in shared panic. The avalanche rolled on and on. Across the entire width of the street. And there were just as many behind us. Although so many had already passed by in the last few days. Wawa crossed over, too. During one of our strolls Swen and I noticed in the crowd a large hat with a rolled brim and under the brim violet eyelashes, and a handbag held under an arm.

Why was the line moving slowly? Stopping? Standing? Maybe it was so that those who really had priority could run across? Perhaps there was an obstruction on Aleje from time to time? Or heavy artillery fire? From the Vistula, let us suppose. And from the Central Station. Perhaps it was a tank attack, although the barricades weren't letting tanks through between the National Bank (on the corner of Nowy Świat) and Marszałkowska — that happened only afterward.

At first it had been difficult to knock together those barricades. And to prepare that passageway. But after great difficulties both were ready. Therefore, the major cause of slowdowns and of standing still in the line, or, rather, two lines (because people were also coming to our side from the far side of Aleje), was simply the fact that there were two lines. And that permission was given first to move from our side past Aleje, and then to move from beyond Aleje to our side. As usual — people scurrying about, from here to there and there to here.

Despite the fact that the general rush was in that direction. The corridors were too narrow and winding for people to pass each other. It was impossible to allow a mass collision in that crush. Because — I remind you — there was a fashion of rushing everywhere all the time. Because it wasn't a question of fashion but of artillery fire, haste, and air raids. Well, of impatience, too. In the end.

Well, when we'd joined the stream of people at the Widok gate or in the courtyard we stood still for a while, then edged along for a short time in a phalanx. Then again we stood still. Until the time came for our side to go over to their side, when we really got moving. Or rather, we dashed into the cellar. Into corridors that weren't cellar-like but trench-like, or, rather, into artificial tunnels hastily dug out for the circumstances. In the corridors, the turnings, it was very hot. And one could see that they were made of earth, with the roots still in it.

The passageway, or, rather, the runway, under Aleje Jerozolimskie itself was even narrower. Flatter. And without a roof. Of course. There were shields from the barricades. I remember that the one on the left from Nowy Świat was directly above us. There was really no way of adding on a roof. Because it would have meant working on it above ground. And the Germans from the National Bank were taking care of things here. So to provide a roof, stumps and palings had been thrown over, branches (pines) spaced in rows. Just as they landed. Wherever. The more the better. I get a little confused here with the picket-fence supports of the trench.

There was artillery fire. Normal, I think. Nocturnal. Not too threatening, that is. That's what it seemed like to me.

One-two — and we're already on the other side of Aleje. We rush into the same sort of tunnels, windings. Corridors. Some of them, however, were made of brick. Perhaps in part. And it may have been on the other side of Aleje that it was hot. Maybe because of the fires.

We ran out with the crowd — in moonlight — onto Nowogrodzka Street between Bracka and Krucza. On Nowogrodzka, on the ground floor in an inner courtyard, lived a former colleague of Father's, Mieczysław Michalski. Father led the whole "moonlight cavalcade" (as Halina called it) with bundles shining in the glow to Miecio's. We crossed the street. We went through a Secession-style gate. And right into a four-story courtyard, to a moonlit well with picket fencing at the center. It seemed to be a garden. We all lined up and rested our bundles and backs against the picket fence. And waited. Quite tired. Father immediately went into one of the entryways. To Miecio. Unannounced. As a matter of fact, we didn't even know if he was here or even if he was alive.

That wait with our backs toward the garden must not have lasted long. But it stretched out for us. Already after several days. Into a

lengthy, drowsy uncertainty. Somnambulistic. Because the moon was full.

Father came rushing out of the entrance.

Miecio was alive. He was. Meaning, he's here. With his sister. They have a room with a kitchen. They invite us in. We collect our packs and our bundles from the picket fence. Some of the bags were completely white. Halina's was, definitely. I remember. In the moonlight.

Introduction, hospitality, we spread our things out, make ourselves at home immediately; there's a place to spend the night. The ground floor — semi-salvation. We can sleep. On whatever. Just to stretch out. Shelling on the ground floor isn't given much consideration. If it's not a vicious attack. And there was nothing vicious. Aimed in this direction. The moon was shining. So it was peaceful. A sigh of relief. Food. A table. We sit down. We chat. We wash. Everyone. By turns. In basins. In real water. With soap. And to sleep.

Yes. That was no earlier than the night of September 6–7. From Wednesday to Thursday. We didn't know what day of the week it was then. I am figuring it out now. We only knew the dates. Because from the beginning there was that confusion, that chaos. Not later. Because as I found out afterward, Powiśle fell on September 6. And after all, those people from below, from Tamka, Okólnik, Oboźnia, came running up, screaming: "Powiśle's fallen!" (definitively, that time).

That's proof of the date.

Perhaps I've exaggerated in saying one-third of Śródmieście. That it was ours. Because Powiśle and the ghetto, or no-man's-land, were cut off. And you have to remember that Śródmieście didn't include as much as it does now.

On the other hand, I didn't add (and this is important for people who don't know the history of the uprising) that part of Mokotów, both upper and lower, was always ours. Southern Powiśle was ours (the so-called southern part near Czerniaków) and Żoliborz, including Marymont. Only, these were separated cauldrons.

In the morning, an air raid. On our "new" Śródmieście. A bomb somewhere nearby. An explosion. And something was drifting down on us already. Soot. Father was completely covered. Because he was sitting under the vent. He jumped up. And he stood there black and helpless with his arms slightly extended. We began to laugh. How could we help it? It was impossible not to. And then we cleaned him off right away, washed him, scrubbed him; especially Zocha. We also had to scour ourselves. Again.

It was hot. After the full moon, a full sun. As there was every day (without exception!). But, how did things work out on the far side of

Aleje? Amidst this luxury? It turned out that even this last refuge would be shaky. For the time being it was still peaceful. Relatively speaking, of course. With shellings. Air raids, now and then. But in those days, that was peace.

I already knew this peace would end at any moment. That for the time being they were bombing that part of Śródmieście. But at any moment they could pick themselves up and come over to my new district.

In other words, the same thing for the fourth time. And again it would be necessary to start coming to terms with death. Or with the tearing off of an arm or leg. That one of us might die, just one, didn't occur to us. We always thought that we would die together.

I think Swen and Zbyszek went to Żurawia immediately to inquire about Danka. And Father and I, the two of us, I think, went to 21 Wilcza to Zocha's, Father's, and Halina's closest friends. To Jadwiga and Stanisław Woj. To move in with them. Because we had crossed Aleje with that intention. In addition, I think, it seemed better to us to be on Wilcza Street than here on Nowogrodzka. Was it an anti-Aleje motivation? An urge to move southward? An urge. Indeed! All creatures when terrified run around, hide, run around some more.

Before Wilcza, I think, we dropped in on my schoolmate Zdzisław Śliwerski. About his being a schoolmate? I could say a lot about that. 6 Żurawia. The second floor. Zdzisław's father opened the door. And Pani Śliwerska appeared right away. They made a gesture of invitation. But one could sense the uneasiness. In addition, it was on the second floor. So staying there lost its attractiveness. Because they too must already have been thinking about a shelter. We chatted in the foyer. Standing up. Then for a long time at the door and on the stairs. Everyone was panicky. I asked after Zdzisio.

"Zdzisio's on Emilia Plater Street," Pan Śliwerski told me, "with his unit."

"On Emilia Plater?" I was surprised, because I didn't think we had men there, that far.

"Yes. Emilia Plater. Would you like to look for him there?"

"Yes. But can I get through?"

"Well, yes." And he gave me the name of the unit. It was supposed to be at the corner of Wspólna or Hoża. One of the corners.

We went first, however, Dad and I, to Wilcza Street. Down the length of Krucza. But to go via Krucza itself was dangerous. Or perhaps we still used Krucza then. It's easy to forget. Because there were barricades everywhere. High. Flung together. Out of paving stones. Certainly, even if it was possible to use the street, you couldn't take it all the way. There'd be a gate, a courtyard, a hole in a wall, a doorway. Another hole. Into a cellar. A courtyard.

The crowds were unbelievable. That part of Śródmieście was absolutely jammed by then. People were still arriving. And they were expected to keep on arriving. Every hole and corner was swarming with people.

No doubt a courtyard-hole route had already been prepared by then along the left side of Krucza (as you walk away from Aleje). Then that route descended even farther underground. And since like other routes, or, rather, "Champs-Élysées," which I knew from the uprising, it was amusing — because there were pipes and holes and little cellars, twists and turns in it — a jingle came into being about this walk down pseudo-Krucza. And we read it in the newssheet. Out loud. Laughing heartily. Just as in Stare Miasto. With the wound-up wardrobe. Called a "cow" here. Because actually, if you listened to it for a while (and you didn't have to hear it for too long— it was a noisy creature) then it did sound something like a cow bellowing. (Those mine throwers, the "wardrobes" or "cows," viewed after the war in the Army Museum in Warsaw, amazed me. Especially the shells. Six or nine together. They looked like milk cans. In other words, something to do with cows.) Here, on the other side of Aleje, I saw apartment houses that had been uprooted by the "cows," narrow ones, but often five stories high. And when I said that the "cows" weren't anything serious, people responded: "Oh, they're capable, you'll see." And they were.

Some people also shrugged off artillery in the same way. Especially those huge mortars, which I associated with something solid, like a metal, brass perhaps, but this name "mortar" was from the mortars used for grinding pepper and cinnamon.

People would also say to me about them, "You'll see…"

I replied, "But they can't break through into the cellars."

And they responded to that: "Ha ha! They can't break through? You'll see how they'll break through!"

And that was also the truth.

I have already spoken about how acute our hearing had become. To distinguish what was the front. What was a different district. What was beyond Aleje. What was two streets over. And what caliber. By ear. Halina and I had our own terms. For flying missiles. Some shells meowed strangely. We would say, "Aha, the cats!"

The "Berthas" were the worst. They were, as far as I can remember, three-quarter-ton bombs. Three-quarters of a ton isn't too bad. Only it was three-quarters of a ton of bomb, and straight from the sky, at a slant. I think that was the decisive factor. Well, the ones from the sky fell slantwise, at an angle. And those from the side also came in at an angle. The difference wasn't so great. But yet there was a difference. I insist on my interpretation. I'm talking only about the toll

in the cellars.

Pani Jadwiga was in the shelter. They had all gone down to the ground floor already. Or rather, to the shelter. Pani Jadwiga said they had gone down and told us: “Come over, you’re most welcome, really, come over; only it’s a cellar. Anyway, Stasio will be coming right away.”

Pan Stanisław, Stasio, was on duty. He was guarding the roof. With others. He came down right away. At any rate, not too long afterward.

“We lie on the roof in case anything should happen and keep watch with wet rags.”

“In case of fire.”

Pan Stanisław got the bright idea that we should try to stay on the ground floor. They had a neighbor, an elderly woman who lived alone, Pani Rybkowska. She had two rooms and a kitchen on the ground floor. She herself was staying in the shelter. She’d been there for a long time already. She was very frightened.

“We’ll arrange it right away!” And he rushed off.

“Good, it’s taken care of, she agrees, come over. Come on over!”

The building at 21 Wilcza was five stories high. And it had a sunken courtyard. So being on the ground floor in such a building wasn’t the worst alternative. Especially since there was an apartment. For us. And a shelter is a shelter.

Another thing about the height of buildings. The best part of being here, in southern Śródmieście, was precisely this: it was the tallest district in Warsaw. The buildings were five, six, seven stories high. And even higher. Often solidly built. The streets were narrow. Or, rather, crowded together. In general, southern Śródmieście was the largest district in the uprising. In length and width. No, I’m exaggerating. And I’m not justified in dividing Śródmieście into two centers. After all, they communicated with each other.

In Śródmieście — in general, throughout it — there was one more characteristic feature. There were drafts of civilian labor. Not exactly roundups but such that — in case of need — passersby were stopped and half commanded, half requested to do such and such. And told it was for two or three hours. So everyone went gladly. Generally, such requests weren’t refused. Although it’s not safe to speak of everyone. At that time practically everything was done. But since there were an awful lot of people, probably more than 200,000, no one asked me to do anything. And so I lazed about in private.

One more thing. In Śródmieście there was an extraordinary mixture of civilians and partisans. There were many who sported armbands. Various semi-partisans. Intermediate positions. A tendency to “free enterprise.” In short — variety.

Pani Jadwiga told us right away that at the beginning she'd sewed huge quantities of underwear, forage caps, and other uniform parts.

We returned to Nowogrodzka with our encouraging news. Swen also came back with encouraging news. They had found Danka on Żurawia. With the Szu. family. She'd been renting a room from them. Except that by now they were really in the cellar. Not on their third (I think, third) floor. Danka comes there but she's a liaison officer in the Home Army. So she sits in a cellar and broadcasts and receives. And it's close by. Also on Żurawia, I think. Zbyszek remained with her. He's going to enlist. Or rather — they're going to accept him. If there are enough weapons. It seems there were. Because there were captured ones, too. Also, from the parachute drops. Not as many as were needed. But it was really beginning to amount to something. The weapons, that is. It seems there were a lot of people there, too. New volunteers to replace those who had died. Because the front was across the water at an angle… I remind you — Mokotów, Czerniaków, Żoliborz were ours. After the fall of Praga and then of Ochota, Powązki, and Wola, for a long time the situation in terms of terrain was encouraging. But let's not exaggerate — already after a week something was not right.

Let's return to our story. Swen, too, had also practically "settled in" already with the Szu. family. That is, in the cellar. He stayed with us awhile longer on Nowogrodzka. We were still able to eat something here, perhaps get something to drink, too. But probably that's wrong. We drank wine on Chmielna Street. After the sewers. Because they had some. Another Bertha or a bomb must have landed somewhere. Because again Father was suddenly covered in powder. This time it was blue. There was a pharmacy nearby. Or a soap factory. It was hit. Straight into the bluing for laundry. And again it fell on him. Again laughter. Cleaning. Washing. I also recall our daily eating of soup. And I think I was the one who found a hair. Hers. In the soup. But I could be confusing her with someone else's sister who looked like Miecio's wife, at some other, also dangerous, time. Also in the soup.

So, forward to Wilcza! Swen to Żurawia. And thus we entered a new phase. Topographic-residential.

The first thing we did — on Wilcza, at Pani Rybkowska's — was build a stove. A more solid one this time. Made of several bricks. Held together with clay. With a grate in the center. And an ash pan. Zocha started cooking something right away. I don't know, could it be that our stove fell apart right away, before it dried, and we built it again? Pani Rybkowska was more afraid than curious. We met her only on the second or third day.

We got plenty of sleep. Because there was a lot of room. In front of the windows there was a bin for something or other. Near the bin

was a water barrel. In case of fire. On the left, a gate. On the right, a wall with a hole in it. Into 7 Krucza Street. Because there was a latrine and water there. The wall was gray: cat-colored. The whole building was the same color. One more detail: opposite us, a little to the left, squeezed into a corner, stood Pani Trafna's little house. Pani Trafna was a Jew, according to what Zocha told me afterward. I don't know if they knew each other before or not. She and Pani Trafna. We became friends. Quickly. As people did in those days.

On the first or second night I was on duty. In our courtyard. 21 Wilcza. There was one other person with me. Stanisław was also there for a long time. He was smoking. And Father was there. They stood around. Talked. So did I. We stood on the mounds, in the little valleys, on the boards of the excavations. At night you can sense the terrain without visual preconceptions. The moon was shining. It was waxing. For the second time already. Clear nights. At least without any fires close by. It was very warm throughout the night, so I wore only soft shoes without socks (where could one get socks? — a luxury), trousers, and a shirt. A light one. Perhaps because of the moonlight.

Swen arrived on the second day. We sat there for a while with Halina. The three of us. In the front room with the sofa. The one with the window right there opposite the water barrel. Maybe we played something. Maybe I read something. Maybe Swen did, too. I'm almost positive that I wrote something. But I'm less clear about remembering this. Or so it seems to me. But no. It was precisely here that I finally wrote that play about the shelter. Still on the paper from the desk at Podwale, corner of Kapitulna.

Maybe it was then that the cow began bellowing. Started firing. It was certainly close by. Because when the second one bellowed we ran downstairs just as we were, not completely dressed, without shoes on and (somehow) in socks. They were next door. We flew down — an understatement. One turn of the banister into a flying squat! And we were in the cellar. Just as on Rybaki Street.

Swen took me over to his place. To show me where it was. Then, I think, to Zbyszek's. Zbyszek had been inducted already. To the Kiliński Battalion because the Home Army had no room. Nearby. On one of the streets between Żurawia and Hoża. Or was it Wilcza? From Krucza to Three Crosses Square. We entered the ground floor.

From the gate. Into a room jammed with partisans. And in the crowd, sitting on a sofa with his legs stretched out in front of him, was Zbyszek, apparently already in uniform.

"For the time being, we're sitting and waiting because we don't have any weapons," he said.

Somewhere near Swen's place on Żurawia we went into a cellar. In one of the bins for coal or potatoes, Danka was sitting on a chair

between two walls, manning an apparatus like the back of an exposed radio. She had earphones on. And she was connecting and disconnecting various plugs and jacks with both hands simultaneously, at a very rapid pace. She was speaking at the same time, too. Codes. For example: “Bee-vee! Bee-vee! Six! ma-ta-ha here! ma-ta-ha here! hallo, hallo, we’re transmitting, en-ka — eighteen! hallo!”

There were longer runs of code but immediately broken off for some reason.

And so on. Continuously. Rapidly. Once, after a long wait (ours), she leaned a little in our direction. Something like “Hello, what’s new?” And then again the same thing. She couldn’t break away. How could she? But we weren’t bored. Absolutely not! It was the first time I was in such a transmission center.

Once on Żurawia, either upstairs while we were still in the Szu. family’s place (they were all in the cellar) or in the courtyard — I remember that we could hear a lot of people, socializing, the clinking of forks and knives. To this day I am certain that it was a name day celebration. Which means: I’m not at all certain. That’s what it seemed like to me. And still does. But it’s strange. The more I picture it. It was afternoon. Sun. Heat. Dust. In the courtyard, a lot. Of what? Various things. Chaos. People running around. That name day party both surprised and depressed me. Even irritated me. Not just the lightheartedness. But as an incontrovertible sign that something bad. Was approaching.

Because it was approaching, approaching.

The apartment on Wilcza was splendid but we already had a place in the shelter. And it was in the shelter that we began to spend the nights. Only once we sat up through the night, or rather, we slept through the night sitting up, Halina and I, on the green plush sofa. It stood near the door to the stairs. And that’s where we remained. Because I had a longing for the luxury of space. To have it just once. And Halina, to keep me company. And because she hadn’t yet become accustomed to spending the nights in cellars. She had on a dark coat (well — a winter coat, she was wearing it in order to keep it with her). With ash-gray fur trim. On the sleeves. And on the collar. She snuggled against that fur as if it were her cats.

We had some bedding in the shelter. Something made of down. It was puffed up in the center and red on top. How many feather beds did we have? Two? We had something to cover ourselves with. What we slept on I don’t know anymore. Stools? Benches? I think a little of everything. We also snuggled up. Into the bedding. There were a lot of eiderdowns and pillows in our cellars and cubicles. They glittered. Crimsons. Vermilions. Could that have been under electric light? Probably not. Carbide lamps! Candles! There were people everywhere.

In every nook and cranny. We were the only ones working on the ground floor. Though only at certain hours. And in daylight. Pani Trafna was in her own little house. But probably Pani Trafna moved into the cellar for good. Which was good. Because soon they began firing into our courtyard. Often, large-caliber guns. Persistently. Grenades. Cats (so-called), cows. Berthas. Medium-size mortars (like pestles making quick work of cinnamon sticks!). Something from overhead probably. Because the building began disintegrating from above. Little by little, in installments. First it was smashed. Then it began to grow smaller. Maybe it caught on fire. Definitely. But they always managed to put it out. Pan Stanisław ran around a lot (and he was tall). He kept an eye out. Wet rags on sheets of metal. To the point that he was lying and a little crooked, head hanging down, over the rain gutter. Is that how I pictured him to myself? Invented him?

Pani Jadwiga would scream at him in the cellar: “Don’t go! Stasiu! Don’t go!” And when he left she became distressed. And since he went at every call she was only a little accustomed to it and thus — distressed. She was a milliner. So a colleague of both Stacha and Zocha. She and Staś lived together at first for fifteen years without getting married because they were afraid of legalities, of deromanticizing. At one point, with great trepidation, they summoned their courage. Marriage. And again fifteen years went by. In marriage. It didn’t spoil anything. And later they lived in Jelenia Góra together until the end.

Pani Jadwiga preferred having her bed near us. In our cubicle. Because we made up a family. They — the two of them, that is, and Stacha, Zocha, Halina, Father, and I. Next to us, Pani Trafna. Other women, men, children. Entire herds. Past the right entrance — farther along. On the left, in the previous cellar, were the earliest occupants of spaces.

And Pani Rybkowska. The one wearing glasses, who sometimes dropped in on the ground floor. To her home. That is, to us. Very infrequently. But she had a need to check in. Once she checked to see if we’d accidentally broken glasses in the cupboard. Another time, she complained that we’d moved the cupboard. I don’t know why it was standing at an angle. That was when she was there. Another time, what she was worried about was a painting, wonder-working, of Our Lady of Częstochowa, which was behind the cupboard. A cheap little painting. Behind dusty glass. Colorless. Now she herself pushed the cupboard away and slipped in behind it. Often she would sit with us for a while on the ground floor while supper was being prepared and the stove put back together, because a cow or mortars were always knocking it over; Pan Stanisław would sit with us, too. (Zocha barely refrained from making faces at Pani Jadwiga’s constant “Stasiu, Stasiu,

don't go." Finally it advanced to taunts about it. By both of them. A mild insult and brief. But the times weren't conducive. They'd become close again. And address each other politely. Until after the war. But after the war they were angry at each other for good. From Gdańsk to Jelenia Góra. Until finally they made up. That was when Stasio died.)

And when Pani Rybkowska went on too long about the cupboard, the painting, and the glasses and began checking up on us, Pan Stanisław would join us in saying, "Oh no! Planes!"

"Really?" Pani Rybkowska would ask.

"Really," we'd say.

And she'd flee to the cellar. She believed us. Why not? Once, while we were sitting on the couch (Zocha was cooking) the water barrel was hit. A fountain gushed sideways from the barrel. Then they struck here and there. Then they pounded Pani Trafna's little house. Once. Twice. Dried-out whitewash, parapets, laths sifted down. Dust was sifting down from the apartment house, too. And plaster flew about. Window frames, too. And sheets of metal. The roofs were still made of zinc then. For the most part. Pani Trafna's little house was growing smaller and smaller.

Also in the shelter with us, or rather somewhere near the door, because there was something about that doorway… was it drafts, quarreling? Probably so… Well, there was also a Pani de la something. A Frenchwoman, apparently. Or only the wife of a Frenchman. But a widow in any case. She lived on the fifth floor. Probably. Once, there was a scene. In the whole courtyard. A huge gathering of men. Block leaders. Half block leaders. Quarter Home Army. Reviling the surrounded, terrified Pani de la something in her threadbare coat in front of the stairwell — her stairwell and ours — because they had just caught her relieving herself on the fifth floor. In front of her own door.

But that was nothing. That, too, passed. The latrine was in the next building: 7 Krucza. I no longer remember if we went through the second courtyard first (naturally, initially through a hole in the wall). Right. To get water. And farther on was the first courtyard. Counting from Krucza. From the front. Or if immediately after the hole one entered that enormous long courtyard with an enormous pit in the center. With an entire valley dug out with shovels. From bare earth. And there in the center of the hole in an even bigger hole was a pump. There was always a line of people. Often a long one. Which wound around three times. So that it completely filled the valley. Which is also what it was for. The crowd was at its largest in the afternoon. Also toward evening. When there was hope that it would begin to grow dark. Because it was as if the planes went to sleep then.

And the latrine? The latrine was more or less to the right of the

hole. At the end of the courtyard. It doesn't really matter which one. Off to the side. Somewhere in a corner. So that because of its narrowness it had room for only a kind of perch. With a hole. For shit. And a path. To reach it. When you sat down on the perch above the hole you had — practically in front of your nose — a shed with something or other inside it. And something above it that rose higher and higher. A side of the annex, probably. Windowless. And behind your back or, rather, behind your a—, was an enormous wall several stories high. Also windowless. Above you there was a tiny strip of sky (narrow and long). Shells would be flying across it. I wanted to say: creatures. But only those. Artificial ones. The live ones were in the cellars. One of the women in our cellar had a dog. What breed? Small and fat. Pan Stanisław said that you could balance a glass of water on that dog (a bitch perhaps?). And he told the woman who owned the dog or bitch, "I'd advise you to watch out for him!" Because apparently, and even for certain, people ate dogs then. And cats.

In the shelter, not this one but the one next door, under number 23 (an immense seven-story building of the old sort, Secession-style, we envied them their Klein vaulting) — well, next door we had a radio station. It was in one of the potato bins. Behind thick boards. But with chinks in them. I say "we had" because we used to rush there. For the radio.

"Beep-beep-beep — beeeep! — BBC…"

Several times a day — news. We would stand in front of those boards. We placed our ears against the chinks. We ran there straight from our place. From our pallets. From our own shelter. Through other shelters. Corridors. Holes. Gaps in the wall. Until we got to somewhere in the depths of those shelters. Under number 23. That is, we were running through cellars. As was done everywhere. Without need of surface paths.

I remember a Sunday morning and Mass during the early, perhaps the very first, days on Wilcza. One of the women loaned her apartment for it. On the ground floor. At right angles with ours. That is, to the left from the gate onto the street. Windows onto the courtyard, naturally. She even prepared a carpet and palms. Perhaps a palm. Just one. And the other, could that have been a dracaena? There was something there. Churchly. Seemingly. After Mass there was confession. Communal. Because there were a lot of people. With the condition — recited aloud — that we'd go to individual confession if we survived all this.

Sunday fell on September 10. That was the second Sunday in Śródmieście and the first one we were aware of on the other side of Aleje. Or rather, which we realized was a Sunday. Later, until the very end, until the middle of October, no one anywhere distinguished the

days. Recently, I calculated, because the date is significant, on what day of the week October 1 fell. Recently, which is to say, twenty years later. And to my amazement I discovered for the first time that it was a Sunday.

You remember. August 6 on Chłodna. ("Maybe the Good Lord will change something.") The consciousness of it being Sunday. August 15 —Rybaki — a holiday — the miracle at the Vistula — but they're not coming. September 3—a Sunday like that day of gun salutes in 1939. On the same confluence of date and day. The sofa. Chmielna. And this fourth one. Well-known. Festive. Now. And that — is all.

In those first days the route along Krucza Street had already descended underground. On Krucza itself between Wspólna and Hoża lay a woman's bloody shoe (with a piece of foot). From then on people began to be a little more careful. Only one stretch — from our Wilcza to Hoża — became known for its safety. People began to swarm over it. They swarmed between Wilcza and Piękna, too, or, rather, from our corner to the end of Krucza. From the south. Up to the square at the intersection of Piękna, Krucza, and Mokotowska. Across the square, facing the intersection of Krucza, along the whole southern side of Piękna, was a barricade. Long. Solid. Made from sacks and bags filled with something. And from paving stones. But the barricade wasn't high. You had to run. And crouch down. And watch out for Krucza as you approached the square. Because that's where the firing from Marszałkowska and Redeemer Square began.

But people ran back and forth. Many of them. A great number. On Krucza and Mokotowska there were many billets. For partisans and for civilians. So both civilians and partisans were running up and down Krucza. And hybrids. Krucza was undoubtedly the main street of southern Śródmieście. Probably because it resembled a street. And had traffic. Despite the various ruins and barricades. And despite the fact that it was only this one stretch. But that was enough. For it to dominate. It suddenly became a substitute Aleje for all of Śródmieście. On Krucza you could take care of many things. On Krucza people met their families, friends. Arrivals from various districts. People who had acquired it as their third or fourth district. In their uprising path. Here you could meet someone you hadn't seen for ten years. Suddenly. As I did. Also. I encountered Count Franio Z. From school. After so many years. Later, someone else.

On Krucza we met Roman Ż. In Home Army uniform. "Atos." The fellow who came to Chłodna that time on July 31, when there was that storm and the air raid simultaneously. To say goodbye. To Mama. And me. And who knew Halina. I think he knew Father and Zocha, too. That's not important. He visited us right away. Once, and then another time. Zocha treated him. To freshly made soup. A whole

bowlful. Roman was getting ready to eat. But suddenly a cow: u-u! u-u! u — u! — and plaster showering down from the ceiling. Right into the soup. Roman spooned up whatever could be eaten. He ate the smallest pieces of ceiling. The second time it was the same, I think. With the difference that the stove collapsed, too. Which didn't bother us. Because we put it back together immediately from scratch. The ceiling was falling every day, it seems. In large chunks of plaster. In strips. Into the soup. And onto our heads. And there was plenty to fall down because although it didn't look so good from the outside, on the inside it was also a Secession-style building. Or rather, that fifth or sixth Warsaw classicism. Covered with stucco. Rosettes. Garlands. Cornices. To say the least.

A brawl in southern Śródmieście. Our final lifeline. After our renting the place on Wilcza (for nothing, because there was no money in circulation — at that time!). The ground floor. One-two-three. Because after all — there was the shelter. Almost immediately. And after a couple of nights, thinking instead about number 23, next door. Our place had those five stories above it. But it was already somewhat shrunken. Eaten away. In addition, it turned out that it was in fairly poor condition. From the outset it hadn't looked too sturdy. Or fortresslike. But then the gray plaster started falling off in bits. Whitish-yellow. Dried out. So it crackled. Boards. Laths. And that name I came up with — whitewash: something ceiling-ish. And that turned out to be the trusses. So we left. The entire group. From under number 21 (literally from under, because we moved underground). To look over number 23. Under the guise of moving. The tenants in number 23 knew us. We knew they agreed. And even had they not known us it would have been the same. There was still a little bit of space. So we looked it over. I remember how each of us in turn praised the Klein vaulting and the rest looked it over, patted it. Various people, old ladies. Everyone valued, was knowledgeable about, patted that "Klein." It seems that Klein, simply a certain Pan Klein, a Jew, a German, had made a good discovery. And just in the nick of time. So that people had managed to build a good many buildings like that in old Śródmieście in the days of Prus and Proust.

Clearly, the bombs must have been falling because our decision-making didn't take very long. We began to gather our belongings, our bundles, and quick as a wink, under Klein we went! If it hadn't been for that Klein, or rather, that barrel vault made of bricks and gleaming iron. Then that cellar wouldn't have differed so very much from this one. We occupied something communal over there. With an entry farther on. With an exit into our place from the preceding cellars. And again feather beds. Benches. Bags. Families. Sitting around.

Just about everyone from Wilcza made the transfer.

Bombs. And shells. Raining down. Large ones. We sat in the central corridor, the farthest from the openings to the outdoors. To the left the corridor had one little cellar after another. Each one with tiny doors. Only they were open. In the nearest one lived the Wi. family. Pan Wi., an engineer, and Pani Wi., his wife. They sat on sacks. Which had something in them. All day long. That's how they managed. She looked like Gioconda. But her neck, voice, and speech were like a turtledove's. Because that's what Halina called her. They had two small children. The children ran around with the other little children. They walked up and down the corridor. They played like this:

"You go over there with a bag and then we'll meet."

So they separate. With their bags. And meet:

"Hello."

"Huhwo."

"Has your house b-burned down?"

"Yes, it's b-burned"—a dismissive gesture—"your house, is it b-burned?"

"Yes, b-burned…"

There was also a game of tanks. Pani Józia watched after the Wis.' two little ones. A teacher. As soon as there was a blast she would stick her fingers in her ears. And since there were a lot of blasts she sat or stood with her fingers in her ears. But since she was looking after the children and talking with them or with the Wis. or with other people, she was constantly unplugging her ears. Then quickly plugging them again.

She'd ask, "What?" Yes, she'd adopted the gestures of a deaf woman. Or a mute. Once, little Ewa (she was Ewa, I suddenly remember that) wants to go poo. They have a potty. Pani Józia sits Ewa on the potty. In the corridor. Pani Wi., in the little cellar drawing room, is sitting on her sack. And she yells: "In the center! In the very center!"

So Pani Józia transfers Ewa to the very center. She plugs her ears. Because they're shelling.

But Ewa is becoming frightened, too: "Auntie, give me your hand!"

Pani Józia holds Ewa's hand while she's on the potty. And with her other hand she plugs her other ear. She hears with the first ear. Well — this way's good, too.

Right. Their mother from Bracka was also there. And young Jadzia was of some help to them there. But more likely they were just sitting there. Because each family was large then, but their little cellar was tiny. The blasts echoed along the corridors. Shock waves. And songs.

We fly to Thy protection

O Holy Mother…
Near us, later verses were being sung:
Oh, Holy Mother,
Oh, Holy Mother,
O-oh, Ho-oly Mo-other—
Our Consoler…

We had Klein above us. Good walls. A few iron plates. And those seven stories. With a mansard roof. Bay windows. Bow windows. Pendants. Six upper floors. Plus a whole domed roof. Plus the ground floor. Eight levels. But only seven that could be penetrated. Because the eighth was — us. They ought not to be able to break through all seven. There were exceptions. At times. But one relied on the norm. And what if a bomb should land at more of an angle and not hit the roof but strike one floor lower? Then only six. Well, it shouldn't penetrate six. And if it should strike the fourth floor? Such a thing had happened in these big apartment buildings. Not to mention the example of the General Savings Association. Then only five would remain. Only this solid structure… Klein. And if a cow should suddenly rip downward from the third floor? And strike the ground floor and gouge out something? From the cellar? A dumb cow? Or a Bertha? Or, rather, something that is seemingly not considered as serious. Or it would be enough if it hit one of the compartments. And it wiped out one of us. A family or an individual. Or next door. Because we worried about our own. And about those who were still nearby but already somewhat farther away — we worried, but somewhat less. About those even farther off but still at this address— even less, but still a little. And about the neighboring building? Or the one across the way? We weren't emotionally invested. But who will dig us out if we should be buried? — They will. — Then who will dig them out? — We will. — In that case? — And what about those really far away? Those were strange calculations. Which everyone made. Everywhere. On the basis of probability. And how many of those who calculated that way perished? Well, how many? No one knew. But it was a horrifying percentage. I am not counting the wounded, the rescued, the extricated. The more of us there were— the better. Seemingly. Because the possibility of so-called accidents (for war is like a collection of unfortunate accidents and an uprising is like the explosion of that collection) is spread among a larger number. Or rather, fewer of us would have to die. At the same time— what difference does it make? If there will be three hundred or five hundred of us in this cellar if it will bury us to a man? And crush us? There was an incredibly large number of people in the ghetto. Not five hundred. Not five thousand. But five hundred thousand. And practically all of those who didn't flee died. Death was the basic premise. The greatest

probability. Almost the only one. Almost a hundred percent. Because it was that way for many — without any "almost." That, too, was an error of statistics! Besides: if the bombs are falling now it means that someone is dying. For every explosion you hear, something is struck. Let's say — not every single one. Because there were duds. Or misses. Or they hit a roadway. Or a lawn. Or the center of a yard. Besides which — if something is struck it may collapse and yet not collapse into the cellars. Then people may be buried but not wounded. But then it's a matter of digging them out. Which is also risky. Because who could clear away the ruins of such a building as ours at 23 Wilcza? Who would attempt it? And how many? And with what? And for how long? And meanwhile we could suffocate. Or something. And the lack of water? And during that time there'd be more air raids, worries. And so on. Now if only a part is buried and it can be quickly dug out, and if only some people have died and the rest are basically uninjured this time around— then that's probably not such a bad average. As an average. For these times. But is it proper that anyone should die? Even if it's only ten people? And won't the next time, then, be the end for all the rest? It could happen several times in the same place. Besides which — everything depends on the number of bombs. But it's known that they drop them only in great numbers. And not on such a vast area. A large one, to be sure. Because they still have Mokotów. The other end of Śródmieście. Żoliborz. Czerniaków. But there are houses there, too. Under the houses — people. Not to mention the partisans in action. With even worse protection. Or without. The more of us who die the worse it is. Because it weakens us. From the statistical point of view, it's also worse. Because now the same number of bombs can fall on a smaller number of people. Or more bombs. And what about the other weapons? Accidents? Cave-ins? It's happened, it seems. And transports to a camp?

Now add to that the destruction of protective structures. If the building collapses, if it shrinks, then our chances become worse. And then. It could shrink even more. And more. Go somewhere else? Where? Buildings are shrinking everywhere. And the crowding. Because people are dying. Right. But buildings are dying, too.

Or fires. Because they happen. Fire itself is nothing. In comparison with bombs. One can flee a fire. People sit in the cellar until the fire is on the ground floor. Until the neighbors call out: "Come out! The ground floor's burning already!"

And they come out.

But then one's cover is lost. Cover? The better it is the greater possibility that it will remain. Or so it would seem. But on the other hand, should a so-called fatal accident occur, then everything good becomes bad.

Over and over. You can do this. Calculate. Ponder. Observe. Run away.

Swen didn't come. One day. Nothing surprising. Neither did Roman Ż. He said he'd come. But he also didn't. Maybe something happened? An action? And then, those air raids… But the next day, too, they don't show up. We wait. Well, they'll come… But it made us think.

We sit there unshaven. We don't wash. Occasionally. Mainly from a bottle. A bit. Here and there. Washing thoroughly is out of the question. There's only a little water. Allegedly there is some. In the valley dug out of Krucza. But that's a large area. And they're firing. But without water? Everyone has to wait until dusk. But at dusk the grenades, mortars, Berthas, cows go wild. In the courtyard weapons have a different significance. Not only bombs but everything else is important. And very much so. Despite that, people go to fetch water. That day, Father goes, too. He takes the bucket. His armband on his sleeve. It's afternoon. The rest of us — Zocha, Stacha, Halina, Pan Stanisław, Pani Trafna — stay behind. Everyone in the Wi. family is staying put. Father is gone a long time. Bombs are falling. Nearby. Far off, too. Somewhere, all the time. But that's nothing. We know that there's a huge line there. It seems they're coming back. Some people. With buckets. Of water. And they tell us how many people are there. An hour. Two. Suddenly there are explosions. Right beside us. Did we get hit ourselves? Did someone rush out to check? Or rush back? Yes. I think people ran back. Without water. Terrified. Because something had exploded. Once. Or more often. Apparently it was a bomb. Nearby. And shells. One hit the well itself. It seems a part of it is gone. Well, yes. The well destroyed, the source of water cut. Tough luck. But the people… What happened to Father? Zocha-Zula and I jump up. We run. Through the hole. To that enormous pit in the large courtyard. It's about ready to grow dark. Or it is growing dark. It's like a battlefield. The wounded. The dead. They've moved them away. Already. Father's not there. He's disappeared. We go back. He's not there. We sit down. It's evening. He's not here. Where is he? Why isn't he here? Where can we look? For his traces? In case. We don't sleep. Zocha and I. No one does. In our family. We wait. Maybe he'll still come. And if he doesn't? We'll have to go from hospital to hospital in the morning. Begin with that. But he will come… Yes. And it's nighttime… And late at that. But he's not back. Finally, toward morning, I think, or in the morning, when we were already certain that something dreadful had happened, he returned. With the bucket, I think. Healthy. Sound. Wearing his armband. It was nothing. A bomb fell. It hit. Destroyed the well. And people? Some, too. Something or other. But mostly they managed to scatter. Father also fled. He ran to

Chopin Street. For water, I think. Right behind that little square with the barricade across it. A colleague of his lived nearby. Whom we knew. All of us. An eternal soldier. Jolly. Pan Kowalski. He tempted Father. To drop in. With the bucket. He goes in there. Upstairs. Because his billet is upstairs. Because one side of Chopin Street is Polish and the other German. So they're not bombing there. So as not to hit their own. The billet is in an engineer's house. With a daughter. A grown girl. The windows are open. It's fair weather. The devil take it! They'll play cards. Probably bridge. Because the four of them sat down this way: Father against the wall, with his back to it, between the windows. Kowalski across from Father. In one window — the daughter. In the other, the engineer. They play. A shell. Soviet. They hadn't taken that into account. The front. Shrapnel flies in. Through one window. And the other. Nothing happens to Father or Kowalski. The engineer is wounded. But that's only half the trouble. The daughter. Her side is torn open. So they run down for a stretcher. Bring it. Load her. Bandage her. I think they carried her somewhere.

"The daughter was in a bad way," Father remembers to this day. "That side, eh… completely torn open… a damaged liver… something… else… I don't know… I tell you, it was bad."

The next day Swen came running over.

"A bomb hit. Our annex. Broke through to the cellars. Half the house is gone."

"Five floors and it broke through?"

"That's just it. I was standing right in the part that collapsed. With other people. At the last moment I managed not only to rush over to the part that's still there but I also shoved a whole family over. They're grateful…"

That was Swen's reflexes. And his experience from Starówka. That you can manage to do a lot between the time a bomb hits and the building collapses.

"The bodies are still lying in the courtyard, come and see."

We ran over. Half the building was gone. Sheets were strewn about the courtyard. That is — something in sheets. I think they'd buried some already. The yard. The house. Everything here looked hideous. Wrecked. You couldn't tell by what. Windows without frames. Heat in the air. Like after a volcano. Something gray. All the time. Hanging there.

On the third day Roman showed up. With his head completely bandaged.

"A Bertha got me on Mokotowska, in my billet, on the seventh floor. The others ran down to the shelter. Two of us stayed there. Suddenly we hear a Bertha. And we're already lying under the bricks. A door had collapsed onto me. And the bricks were on the door. A

piece of wall. I couldn't be seen. I had a chink to breathe through. I could hear people. Walking around. I yelled. They heard me. They ran in. They started digging. And they got me out."

A bomb destroyed the well. Next door. And we started looking for water elsewhere. I think that's why we were running via Hoża, from Krucza toward Skorupka Street (called Sadowa today), until we were practically at Marszałkowska. Suddenly there were ruins. Fresh ones. They bombed. Down to the cellars. The movie theater Urania, the prewar Seagull. (There was a revue here in '42–'43, Polish, with the best singers. Warsaw was buzzing with revues in '42– '43.) As we were walking out, people were leading a lot of Germans out of that Seagull-Revue-Urania. Covered with bits of plaster, walls, in those thin green uniforms. Unbuttoned. Somewhat tattered. Prisoners of war. For an exchange. They'd been sitting under the stone building that was the post-Seagull Urania. A bomb. Hit. Or bombs. And broke through. Those who weren't killed were dug out. Now people were escorting those who hadn't been wounded. Simply to another place. We passed by them. In fact, crowds of people passed them. Rushing by. Some from the bombed-out houses, others to help; some to search, others looking for water, still others on official business. With surprise, really. And the Germans looked at us and at the buildings, and at everything — with fear. And they had reason to. So what that they'd done this to us before? They had wanted this. Perhaps not all of them. And now their own bombs. A paradox. But not a joke.

I'm confused by two moons. One, from August 26 on Miodowa, on that frieze. The other, around September 6 on Nowogrodzka. So a span of thirteen days. That might be possible if you counted it as the interval from one phase to another. However, on Nowogrodzka it seemed to be a full moon. In fact, it most definitely was the moon. But there shouldn't have been a moon on Miodowa. It could only have seemed that way at times. Or memory had already transformed it into a moon. But no doubt it was a reflection of the fires. What would the moon be doing there?

And what was happening with the front? The Soviet front, as people said then. ("Soviets," or simply "Russians," sometimes "Bolsheviks." But during the uprising they used the term "Bolsheviks" less frequently because it had a traditional connotation among us that was inappropriate. They were also called insulting names such as *Muscovites* or *Cossacks*. Names from before the last war. But in this situation, anything that smacked of something of the sort was not used. As the saying goes, "Beggars can't be choosers, so if you have to borrow, ask a Jew.")

Well, it seems that on the night of September 9–10 the first air

raid on the German sector took place. The dropping of flares; the kind that sway and illuminate everything for such a very long time that you could find a needle on the ground; but most of all what swayed back and forth — now longer, now shorter — were the shadows of grass. I remember the blasts. And the flashes. It was all nearby. Onto Koszykowa, Aleje Szucha, Aleje Róż, Chopin Street, and Bagatela. So that we ran out into the street from joy. Later, there were the next raids after more nights. On the night of September 13–14 a Kukuruznik was heard for the first time. Soviet. A biplane. Renowned for its versatility. It chattered. Trr-trr-trr, trr-trr-trr… Right away we called it the chatterbox. It flew very quietly. Very stealthily.

Very low. Shooting it down was difficult for the Germans. They never shot it down. And it made airdrops. Of arms. Of food. Without parachutes. So they smacked down because they weren't dropped from on high — smack! — a bag of rusks, or: smack! — a bag of guns.

People said the guns were broken. I don't know. And about the Western allies' airdrops people said the majority fell on the German sector.

The next night there was another chatterbox. It flew on and on for a long time. Like a glowworm. Trr-trr-trr-trr-trr-trr-trr-trr… More or less in a circle. It came back. It grew quiet. Then again it chattered, trr-trr… As if confused. It hadn't found its target. So it seemed. Like insects. What they know, they do. However, the partisans lit flares each time. And waited. The chatterbox's circling was made easier.

So the front was truly on the move? Apparently so. The radio announced it. And the newssheets. It was moving. Meaning it was already moving here. Facing us.

Until finally it happened.

September 15.

In the heat.

In the afternoon. At four o'clock. Maybe. Or five.

It started.

Suddenly.

Everything at once.

And already it was going on. In the same way.

We could hear Katyushas in this, the rocket launchers people spoke of as "Stalin's organs." That is — a series of bursts, buzzes — and did they heat things up! And all the rest. But I think I'm describing it badly. Because how abruptly a single roar began. As if the sky were striking the earth. Or — and I think that's how I felt then — that it was being torn into pieces completely (so that it was even remarkable that it was still hanging there). And so it went. On and on. Without letup.

I hadn't known that there could be such roaring.

We knew so many things. And yet…

That was one of the major strikes. On the eastern front. In that war. Simply because so much was firing at the same time. Bombs. Other artillery. Guns. And Stalin's organs (the counterpart of the cows/wardrobes). So that, by and large, there wasn't even time for echoes to be heard. We all ran outside. From wherever we were. Immediately. Entire crowds. Crawled out of the cellars. People were standing higher and higher. On boards. On hillocks. On ruins. As if that might help us to see. And yet only the sky could be seen. But it seemed as if by standing on a bit of rubble or on trenches with boards or paving stones — we would be closer. At least we would hear more. Or be in it. Precisely. "Come what may…" There was shock, great shock. Despite certain previous signs in the sky and from the sky to the earth. It must have shocked the Germans even more than it did us. Despite everything. Because we wanted it. If only for that reason.

What was happening over there — in Praga — was hard to imagine. The familiar places, streets, gardens, in which Dantean scenes might be taking place now. After all, the front must be passing through all the buildings, trenches, squares. (Unless suddenly there happened to be an empty space. As was the experience of someone in Śląsk in February 1945, but that was because an entire group got drunk and fell asleep.) And such scenes did take place. One of the greatest cauldrons it seems was right in the middle of Skaryszewski Park. After the war, no matter how many times I walked through that familiar park, particularly near the walled latrine, which was badly scarred by bullets, grenades, shell fragments, I pictured to myself how important this stupid spot was then, that history had touched it in those days, that for more than one person this latrine was the last refuge or the last view of his life. The second cauldron, it seems, was near the Praga approach to the railroad bridge, the one from the Citadel. A lot of Germans were massed there to defend the bridgehead. The Russians attacked them. By air. The Germans, pushed back to the Vistula because the attack was driving them from the land, threw themselves onto pontoons. Afloat. Into the water. But nothing helped. They were massacred. We — observers by ear — looked at each other. Then we shouted warnings at each other.

Afterward — I remember — I shuddered violently from my ears to my stomach and back. I would not have assumed in the past that such roaring could cause so much joy.

The assault must have been awfully intense. One could feel that. By the ongoing tension of the battle. For two, perhaps three hours. Not longer. Because we were standing there all the time under extreme tension. And suddenly everything grew quiet. It was all over already. The sun was still shining. But Praga — was taken. Yes. That

was truly the first happy day. Without a shadow of gloom. Hope emerged. And to tell the truth — certainty. That this was the end of our misery. Of the bombs. Of the Germans.

That certainty weakened somewhat after several days. I don't remember if it was then or during the time of the Czerniaków bridgehead that there was certainty even among the leadership. In the newssheets, too, they were reporting how we should behave when the Soviet army entered. Well — why waste a lot of words on this. An order was issued. Not to give them an ovation. Also not to display hostility. But something on the order of indifference. I remember two words, but I no longer know in which of the newssheets, perhaps some right-wing paper: "maintain silence." "Simply maintain silence." That astonished us. We shrugged our shoulders. After all, some contact had been made. Soviet observers had been dropped among us. In our sector. In order to give instructions to their forces on how to direct their artillery fire. There were attempts at conversation. And requests for help. We heard about Mikołajczyk on the radio.[22] That he was going to Moscow. By plane. I was impatient because he didn't board a plane immediately. Because he was making preparations first. Because he would certainly take a long time to get ready. Oh, God! What naiveté! And what was it all for since nothing came of it anyway?

Attempts at reaching an agreement here — on the spot — across the Vistula, also were only attempts. One could sense that. And somehow it was known. I have no intention of entering further into matters that have already been clarified. I insist on this. It's essential. The English radio also irritated us more than once. Although we were constantly running along the twisting corridors to those chinks — to listen. Well, in the first place — it was irritating because they wove too many extras into their broadcasts to us. "Best wishes for the Jewish New Year." "With smoke from the fires."[23] And a new, although very old, hymn from the time of the Bar Confederation:[24]

To arms,

Jesus and Mary, to arms…

At that time Halina and I thought it was brand new and we liked it very much. Second — we were irritable out of jealousy. Because the front was moving. Because there was an uprising in Paris. Four days. And already Paris was free. That is, it was the way we had imagined ours before it began. Then in Holland — repeatedly, new names of liberated cities. Arnhem cut me. To the quick.

September 18—in broad daylight — suddenly a squadron of American planes flew over. And the whole sky started to flutter with colored parachutes. They really were colored. Assorted colors. They took a long time falling. For our short patience. They had something tied to them. We waited — what? It turned out to be guns, bandages,

and books. It turned out to be, but not immediately. Because not a single parachute landed near us. Apparently, that day there was a bit of wind. It even seems to me that, atypically, the weather was not so hot. So the parachutes were carried away somewhere. Then it seemed as if they were just about to land on us. But not here. But no, we didn't have that impression at all. Because most of it sailed over to the German sector.

After that entertainment our mood was spoiled. Because the front was really in action. Or shooting. The chatterbox flew over by night. But we simply wanted to be taken. And somehow that didn't occur.

One thing important began to happen. Very frequently, as soon as they started to bomb us, the others simply drove them off. With their own planes. But the Germans were stronger over here. Because those who had been driven from Praga to this shore were included in the anti-uprising actions. The artillery began to rage. The armored train fired continuously. From the peripheral railway. From the west. And also there were attacks on the partisan divisions. It wasn't known if the front would hold near the Saxon Gardens. And in western Śródmieście. What surprised me in any case — after the hell on Chłodna and Wronia — was that the front from Ceglana—Łucka was holding right on Wronia.

Immediately after their loss of Praga the Germans attacked whatever they didn't control over here. From the Vistula. Sielce fell. From the fifteenth to the sixteenth. And on the sixteenth Marymont fell. We definitely read about that then. But I'd forgotten. And not only I. How had Marymont held out for a month and a half? A little cluster of houses on sloping sand. Except that on one side it was tacked on to Żoliborz. Bielany was separate then, much farther off and small. Żoliborz was several times smaller. It didn't have as many streets. Rather, its housing stock was mainly apartment buildings. So it was difficult to run through there. Very few hidden niches. The buildings weren't too tall. The only housing blocks that were somewhat taller were near Veterans Square and Wilson Square (called Paris Commune Square today). There were a few narrow streets. Built up near Winnie the Pooh Street. So how did Żoliborz hold out? Yet it did. I know very little about that. On the other hand, I remember what burnt-out Mickiewicz Street looked like. And the center, which was bombed to bits. Wilson Square. Krasiński Square. And the backs of the buildings. Where the terrain slopes downhill. The Germans in the meantime focused their attack on southern Powiśle. The former upper Czerniaków, that is. What went on there I know from Teik who, after all, had already survived Wola. Then Starówka. Then this. He survived — that's a bit too understated. After all, it was they who were falling from the roofs. Men like Teik. They defended Wytwórnia (in August).

And attempted to join Żoliborz. Via Muranów. Żoliborz was late. The Germans expected something. And began to attack. Teik and his colleagues defended themselves in the depot. At the Gdańsk Station. I don't know how many of them came out of that alive. At one moment Teik found himself in the toilet. It was not for nothing that I recalled the Skaryszewski latrine. I know several other tragic latrine stories. Zygmuś M. told me (in a sanatorium already) how as a soldier during the German attack in 1939 he had leaped inside a wooden latrine. How the latrine took a machine-gun round. And Zygmuś thought that was the end of him. I myself, in '43, during a Soviet air raid, rushed into my so-called courtyard lavatory on Chłodna Street. Some other guy rushed in after me. The Soviet planes were aiming at the tracks of the old "Siberia." Not too far from us. The bombs were falling with a thud. As if someone were hammering on metal. And they went somewhat astray. Because they were dropping from a great height. At one point the latrine shook. And we thought it was our time to be buried. The bomb hit the corner of Żelazna and Chłodna Streets. But let's return to Teik. Well, he's there in the depot toilet in Muranów. With a friend. Both of them are lying there for the time being. Unconscious. Then they realize that they can't move. Because the floor and a piece of the wall are pinning them down. Then they want to talk things over. But they can't hear anything. So they dig out. They brace themselves. And in the meantime they communicate in sign language. And now it's time to clear out. They rush into the main hall. The Germans are astonished. They throw two grenades and run for it. Teik calculates while running. They have the grenades and then what? He took off. He chose well. Because he's still alive.

Teik was in Solec, too. The distant end of Solec was peculiar. Cobblestones. I hadn't known that Solec stretched so far. Once, when I was young, I took a long walk there. There were apartment houses, people, women. And since it was fine weather, spring, there was lots and lots of blue sky and water. But where was it, where was it? I don't remember. But those people. Exactly. They caught it there; woe is me, they caught it. And they had the landing there, too.

"Tonight the Soviet" (I think that's the word they used) "troops landed on the Czerniaków beachhead."

That morning I was at the radio chinks myself. As soon as the news came over I started running back to my people. Along the corridors. The turnings. In leaps and bounds. What joy! Until suddenly there was an explosion in my head. Pain. Blood. Well, nothing important. I'd forgotten. How low the passageways were. And those Klein beams. And one of them — iron — whacked me on my forehead. Everything went dark before my eyes. For many years afterwards I had a small scar in that spot.

Well, that landing. And the Żoliborz landing, too (on Krasiński Street), which I think we didn't know much about at the time. They didn't succeed. People died and died. For the rest — retreat. Some went with them. Some of ours, I think. Some of our men from down below and of theirs, too, I think, broke through uphill. To upper Mokotów. And after several dozen hours of the second hope of certainty, along with the rumor (or perhaps the truth): "The Russians seem to be on Książęca Street!"

Which meant only Three Crosses Square and Żurawia Street (how far was that? — a kilometer) and then — us. But no. Later, after that hope, the radio. I hear: "Today at… o'clock… the Kościuszko Division… from the Czerniaków beachhead… driven back…"

In Starówka people had said with a sigh:

"The fifteenth day…"

"The sixteenth…"

"The twentieth day of the uprising."

Now. Here. After so many of these. There was no longer any reason. To count.

"The fortieth — the fortieth."

"The fifty-second — the fifty-second…"

We began to treat it — because we felt it — as the only reality. That was. Is. And will be. People joked:

"Well? And when winter comes?"

"Indeed. And Christmas?"

"So? We'll be sitting here then, too…"

"Perhaps there'll be Christmas trees… from somewhere."

Problems of cold were foreign to us. Distant. That year. Particularly.

For water, we went to Chopin Street. First of all, probably. During the period of the Soviet nighttime air raids. Past the barricade. Because of those gray sacks. And bending down. They were gray at night, too. A straight-ahead stretch. Then a sharp left. It was safest at night.

Then to Wilcza. I don't know if we went to the house just past the corner of Mokotowska, on the right side, right away. Because once we walked on Krucza and Wilcza. Then again on Mokotowska. In any case, somewhere around there. I remember many trips — in daylight. But there were trips in the evening, too. And at dusk. Because we learned the passwords. And the responses (the response was more important). And sometimes it worked. Lots of people went with us. And lots passed us by. Civilians. And partisans. And those who were half and half. With buckets and without. The evenings were warm. I remember dry earth under my feet. And sand. Near the barricades. Antitank trenches. Near holes. Ruins. And those silhouettes in the

darkness. Hurrying.

I remember Wilcza Street once in the daytime. On that stretch between Krucza and Mokotowska. The sun was out. Large buildings. Tall barricades. The smell of paving stones. From the barricades. Narrow passageways. One of the partisans on duty. And, as usual, a crowd. It remained in my memory because at first I was amazed. That there were people there. Walking around. Even the remains of streets. Buildings. It was still summer. A blue sky. A peaceful hour. So, those appearances. And this truth. Sad. I suddenly felt such sorrow. Because it could have been normal. I don't know if I thought about all of Warsaw. Probably not. It was enough that on this stretch. Of Wilcza. Something was standing. Still. Something was alive. It was warm. So, just to begin living normally on this stretch.

Another time Halina and I were out walking. With Zocha or Father. Toward Wilcza. Already near the address that afterwards we came to know much better. It was late afternoon, almost evening. After the heat of the day. It was dry. Dusty. You could feel the soot in your teeth. Jagged fragments, earth, obstacles underfoot. It was right after a bombing. Right there. From a distance you could already note the absence of the four- or five-story apartment house at the corner. No. Not from afar. It was as we were going back. But somehow we already knew it. Because we were walking on Wilcza. And the corner of Wilcza and Mokotowska was bombed. Completely shattered. Precisely — shattered. Drily. Crackingly. Into boards, laths, walls, bricks. The rest, badly scarred, stood there, hung there. The apartment house was pouring out into the streets. Onto both of them. Into the intersection. And falling apart. Sifting down. Because there were pieces of it and pieces of it. But the farther away you walked, the less there was. Of whatever. Now a board, now bricks. And everything dry!

On our way back, since we were carrying water, we picked up several boards for fuel. Everyone was doing it. Why not? It was the same in Stare Miasto. Throughout the whole uprising. Everywhere. Because it was something to burn. We didn't have any idea if people had been killed. We didn't see any bundles. Sheets. At that time — as it happens — there must already have been a great number of graves. In the squares, the grassy areas. After the potatoes were dug out. In the courtyards. And the sidewalks. In our shelters on Wilcza, not far from the radio station, a certain old lady died a so-called natural death. And a funeral was held. In the courtyard.

The mother of Janek Markiewicz's mother also died then of natural causes. In the same district, only a bit farther south. On Mokotowska. Or Służewska. I remember that the two of them had to look for boards for a coffin. They ran around. Janek and his mother

told me about it. Until they found some. They nailed together a coffin. They buried her at the edge of Mokotów Field. On Polna Street. Later it was hard to find. People had already been brought there for the exhumation. They asked, "Where should we dig?"

Then Janek's mother knelt down in the mud, because it was muddy, and placed her ear against the ground. And she seemed to hear her mother's voice. From underground. With her burring "rh": "Don't worrhy, daughterh, I won't cause you any trhouble…"

As for Markiewicz's mother, it wasn't enough that she had stood with her husband, Lech Byliński (the publicist), against a wall on Bagatela in a column with other people. They heard behind them round after round of gunfire. And they could smell smoke, burning. At one moment something strangely melted fell at their feet.

"What's that?" said Lech.

"Don't move," she said.

(A piece of a corpse.)

So it wasn't enough that Lech was taken to the Gestapo on Szucha Street. That probably he was shot there on August 4. After all this the Germans placed Janek's mother and other women on a tank and moved with them down Aleje Ujazdowskie to Three Crosses Square. They used them as a living shield for their attack. Janek's mother sat on the tank. And thought, "All right, but what's it going to be?"

They were getting nearer and nearer.

"Another moment… all right, but what's it going to be?"

Then they turned into Mokotowska. The partisans did not shoot. But finally they started shooting. The people dashed to the gates. They didn't want to open the gates. In the end they unlocked a few of them. And so it wasn't known who was killed, who wasn't.

It was here, I think, that Janek's mother first saw him. And they stayed together until the end. He was quite young then. Still hardly the age of a Boy Scout.

Let's get back to water. To those outings. Afterward it was mainly the two of us, Halina and I, who went. We learned the passwords. We carried buckets. Mostly at dusk. And we were off. With the crowds. To Wilcza. Or a bit farther. Where — I'll describe it right away. I know that on Wilcza, beyond Mokotowska, you turned left into a gate. But was there a second gate somewhere around here? Because inside one gate (the second, I think) you sat in a nighttime line. A long line. Buckets were placed upside down. People sat on them. And chatted. Two hours. Three. It didn't matter. Anyway, we treated it as an excursion with discussions and other pleasures. No impatience. The line moved a bit? The buckets creaked? We did the same. Ours. We pulled them along. And again, plop onto their bottoms and chatting.

Once Halina said we'll go a little farther. She may even have said

that we should go past Aleje Ujazdowskie. It was already good and dark. So there we were. Walking through the courtyards. One. Two. I look out. Where's Ujazdowskie? We're in a not particularly large courtyard. With low walls or something. Black walls.

"This is Aleje," says Halina.

"What do you mean? This?" I ask.

"Well yes."

"You mean it's not a courtyard?"

"It's Aleje Ujazdowskie."

"How can that be?" We look more closely.

"Yes. Aleje Ujazdowskie."

Close inspection was of no use. Those were definitely barricades. Those low walls. The space was enclosed. But was it pitiful! Those black walls were the façades of buildings. Other main streets looked just the same. Marszałkowska, too. We went on. To the other side of Ujazdowskie. Past Ujazdowskie — I don't know — were we there just that once. That time. But the shock, realizing what it was, will remain with me till the end of my life. To have mistaken Aleje Ujazdowskie for a lousy rear courtyard!

Our stove kept on collapsing. And also the building 21 on Wilcza. And Pani Trafna's little house. And the low walls. And the courtyard with the grenades. There was a time when I think we didn't cook on the ground floor. We stayed in the shelter. Then, I think, the food situation was already becoming serious. For everyone. By that time we were down to the last sugar cubes. Once, when Zocha went out of the cellar, I got hold of her bottles. And tipped one into my throat. It was sweet, like juice. Sweet. But suddenly a shock! Something (unusual!) different. Revolting! I swallowed. Because there was nothing else I could do. And I began to think what it could be.

"Oil!"—a sudden illumination. After all, I like oil. Well, yes. If only I'd known it was oil it wouldn't have been revolting.

Once, we had a lot of water in the cellar. Even in the kettle. Stacha was pouring something. Swen came in. With a small bottle.

"May I have some?" he asked, as if the answer were obvious.

"No… no…!" Something had gotten into Stacha all of a sudden.

"Oh, excuse me…" Swen retreated.

"No. Why don't you go for water yourself, just like everyone else does?"

Swen remembers that to this day. Perhaps he's right. Because in those evil days Roman brought me a small but real little loaf of bread. Rye.

"Here." He put it down. I took it. How amazed I was. And touched. After all, I've remembered that about him for so many years. And that's why he lived with me after the war. Because of that loaf of

bread, I think. So one shouldn't be surprised at Swen. Although Stacha wasn't at all mean. She was just in such a mood…

Exactly. It was a question of moods. I return to the stove. The clay one. When we were there in a group. Cooking time. Zocha was taking care of things. Setting things out. She was angry at something. At Father. Or at me. Usually she was kind to me (after the war, too). Even splendid. But suddenly she was furious. And said something. About my mother. Who, after all — as I found out later — was dismantling a barricade and was herded with Stefa and Aunt Józia between those piles of corpses. And then Pruszków. Stefa disappeared at one point. She bought her way out (obviously, not as a Jew, but like so many people). Then came a transport. To Głogów. In Głogów they met Michał. Who had parted with Nanka in Leszno. And didn't know her address. Only through the family from Skarżysko. But after her return Nanka was living with Sabina. Michał came. She didn't want to be with him. It's over! No! In the end she gave in. But what? What was that about? Well, at one point — bombs are falling, the Germans are invading, they're slaughtering people there — and he (I don't know why) says to her, out loud, in the cellar: "Damn you, I hope the first bomb kills you!"

And Nanka immediately walked out to the Germans.

Well, let's get back to Zocha. At the stove. Something stupid in connection with Father. Against Mother. Just to hurt him.

"After all, she was living with your father." She said that to Dad.

"How's that?" I reacted abruptly.

"What do you mean, how's that? Didn't she used to sit on her father-in-law's knee?"

Now I. Unnecessarily. Spat. And kicked the stove. It collapsed. There was a short silence. Then Zocha rebuilt the stove. Like new. It didn't make any impression on anyone. That the stove was smashed. Because — which time was this? At once there was an effort at glossing over. Then conversation. Already something like conversation. Probably I felt stupid the longest. Mama is Mama. But I know why Zocha said that. It didn't mean anything. We talked with each other once, twice. Normally. And the next day I don't think there was any trace left. Except that I felt stupid.

I'll add yet another mood. Before the uprising. In '41. When Father sometimes still spent the night at 99 Leszno. (Because we were living there at the time. With Nanka and Michał.) A return to the place of my birth. Snow was falling. It was morning. Zocha came. Mother wasn't home. Zocha had checked that out. Father was lying in bed. Zocha didn't know that. In the front room. I was sitting by myself in the kitchen.

Knock knock! Nanka opens the door.

“Excuse me, is Zenek here?” Zocha asks.

I quickly close the door to the front room. Before Zocha can see. And I stay in the room. I see. Father is terrified. He’s sweating. Nanka is saying something. “No!” Father covers himself. “He’s not here.” Zocha asks something else. In a normal voice. Nanka says something else. In a normal voice. I think she still wasn’t thinking about what she was going to do. But already her voice was changing.

“After all. What are you doing here? By what right?” And she grabs a brush. On a stick. Zocha’s out the door. Nanka after her. “Get the hell out of here!”

And we can hear — bang! Then they were surprised. The neighbors. Because they overheard from the hall. Pani Bachmanowa. With her thick lips. With a mane of hair. Whom I called King Sigismund the Old. Said, “Nanka? Look at yourself… Nanka…?”

Nanka used to be considered. And is still considered. The height of gentleness. Because that’s what she’s like. Nanka is an angel. But sometimes something gets into angels, too.

But fate is also sly.

It is 1945. Zocha came back from Austria. Through Czechoslovakia. On foot. With a cart. Writing a diary. For the time being she is living with us. On Poznańska Street. I brought her wood every day. Boards from apartment houses. She did the cooking. As during the uprising. And everything was good.

It was the first Corpus Christi. I was sleeping. Morning. I heard through my sleep. Something. Someone. I woke up.

“Nanka?” I jumped up. To greet her.

Zocha, in the meantime, is preparing breakfast.

“Here… please eat…” She offers some to Nanka.

And after all, they hadn’t seen each other. Since that brush.

Well, Głogów. The one from history. From Krzywousty.[25] Mama is there. Michał. At work on the earthworks. Nanka walked thirty kilometers on foot each day — fifteen there and fifteen back. To work. And from work. In wooden clogs. Through snow. Over hills. And she returned full of energy. Even though in the old days she used to go to the Comet on Chłodna Street and walk and walk until she’d say, “Och, my shoes are pinching me!” And then she wouldn’t go any farther.

So was a war necessary for that? And an uprising? And moving people around? For those vice-versa brushes, for magnanimous gestures? I don’t know. They don’t know either. Before this, a long long time ago, Mama also went every so often to check up on Father. Once, he was coming out of Zocha’s hallway. And said he wasn’t coming from her. Then he had another scene — from Zocha. Because Mama was there. After the war, when Mama was already Pani

Piekutowa. Even earlier, in fact. Zocha told me. Once, twice, a third time: “Your mother is a saintly lady…”

And Sabina told me: “So? Your mother ought to treat her to vodka now.”

And both of them, Sabina and Mama, said, “He ought to marry her now. After seventeen years!”

He came back to Warsaw, because in 1945 he went to Gdańsk with Zocha. He married Wala. Nanka and Sabina came for the wedding. But not after that. And they were his sisters. They visited Mama. Mama visited them. Not so long ago Zocha got married. How pleased she was! Father saw her. They wished each other well.

Let us return now to the flow of our story. After September 20. When it was becoming more difficult to wash. Because it was a long way to go for water. Our beards were growing. And growing. Tufts of hair. So when I heard unexpectedly about a barber on Wilcza, on our side of the street, three or five houses down, I began dreaming about a haircut, a shave.

“How much does he charge?”

“One hundred złotys.”

I was surprised that those hundred złotys were worth anything to him. Even before, they were worth so little. In general, that he was charging. Or taking customers.

Swen sat there with his beard. Reddish.

“Well, you know. At such a moment…”

The moment had already lasted fifty days. Why shouldn’t I go? I got one hundred złotys from Father. They had a lot of money. Father, Zocha, Halina. And I trudged off. Through the courtyards. Or maybe the street. In the direction of Marszałkowska. Under those great Secession-style buildings on Wilcza. They were shooting. Of course. Rhythmically. Artillery. I entered a courtyard. And either from the yard or the gate. From the back. I made it. To the barber. He was taking customers. His door was open. I think he had just finished working on someone. Because someone was leaving. He invited me. To take a chair. There was an armchair. I sat down. In front of the mirror. There was also a mirror. The water was cold. And only a little. But there was water. A comb. And clippers. And a razor. And probably an apron. He put it on me. There was soap, too. But everything seemed artificial. Dark. The whole place was dark. Because the front, which faced the street, was carefully boarded up. But the boards had chinks in them. And so it was half dark. The whole place was dirty. Dusty. Everything, of course, was covered with dust. The chair. The barber. Not to mention my head. I remember sitting there. Passivity. Traditional. Like from before. A haircut, a shave. That semidarkness. My spectral likeness in the mirror. Or rather, a half view of the whole

scene. The parquet floor. Yes. My hair flew off. A lot of it. There was rattling against the board, because every now and then something. Somewhere. Pounded. From the artillery. The barbershop was large. It echoed. The street — a tunnel. So also. Its own echo. Added to this one. The barber said nothing. I said nothing. About this. As if it was nothing. I paid.

"Thank you."

"Thank you."

I raced back to my shelter mates. My family. Renewed. Without a beard. Without tufts on my neck. My ears. Never before or after has a barber had such charm and style. Except. September 10, 1939, on the tenth day of the war, on the fifth day of our "wandering," in Równo, for the first time in my life I sat down in a barber's chair for a shave. That barber, however, was still working on prewar momentum. That was barbering!

Lice. It had to be. It was already too long. For there not to be any. Yes. Without water. Those tufts of hair. The cellar. It's well-known. But who? To whom? First, half timidly, some people passed them to others. Cellar to cellar. Street to street. I exaggerate. Perhaps in families. It amounts to the same thing. In one day, two, it was clear. Obvious. No one was ashamed before anyone else. But we gave advice. How to find them. Everyone was searching for lice.

I don't know who was first in our family. Maybe all of us. Żurawia Street had already announced the appearance of lice. Swen came. He said he had them, too. Everyone did. They were around. Lice. Had appeared. It was hard. Your sleeve too sometimes — one crawls out. A person delouses himself a little. Washes up. Looks for them. Flicks them off. And keeps sitting there. It's no secret. Others will crawl over.

We felt them on ourselves. Right away. Like something burning. Everyone at 21 Wilcza. Quick! Look for them! Halina and I rush into the kitchen. It seems the Woj. couple had already found them.

Killed them. In Pani Rybkowska's kitchen. That kitchen. I remembered it. Only from that lice occasion. The kitchen was separate. Where was the entrance? I don't know. From the anteroom? Maybe. We run from door to door, to the kitchen. Halina and I strip off this and that in a hurry. Halina takes hers. Searches.

"Nothing."

She takes mine. I wait, half naked.

"Nothing."

Or maybe I went first. My own things. And she searched after I did. Mine. And nothing. We'd made a fire for the occasion.

"Ech, that's impossible!" Halina says.

Zocha is already preparing to look. And Father. Zocha also says

it's impossible. Halina picks up her clothing. Then mine. Randomly.

"Give me!"

She looks.

"I think we'd better take a good look at the seams. Oh, there's one! Got it!" And flick. Onto the stove.

"Oh, another!" Flick.

"Four! And you?"

"Four."

Or perhaps it was eight each? Anyway, later there were more. And for a long time afterward. Searching for lice became fashionable. We became experienced at it. The right time. The right place. I've described — the beginning.

In the meantime — as I indicated — hunger began to make itself known. Someone traded matches for tomatoes on the corner of Wilcza and Krucza. Then someone brought bread out to that corner. Maybe rusks. Then someone else traded cigarettes. Gold, too, I think. And so the bazaar got started.

We heard that a mill on Prosta Street was in our hands. Still well stocked with lots of rye, wheat, barley. That expeditions were being organized. Caravans. Whoever wanted to go. Fifteen kilos — for the troops. The rest — as much as you can lift — for yourself. It seems people went. Right away we saw people with sacks under their arms. Going to that mill. It was far. It's true. I was surprised. That it was beyond Żelazna. That far. And that it was ours. But it was far. There would be trouble on the road. It was dangerous. Artillery. From the train track. From "Siberia." From beyond Towarowa. From the armored train. That didn't terrify us. We thought that perhaps we should go there. And quickly. Tomorrow. An expedition was actually being organized for tomorrow. The assembly point was on Hoża.

I don't remember how many of us there were. In our group. Groups left every so often. Twenty people. Or was it thirty? Forty? We went: Father, Swen, and I. The others — strangers or semi-acquaintances. I think there were probably some women, too. I remember one for sure. With a sack under her arm. Each person had a sack. His own. It wasn't hard to find sacks. We had a guide. The collection had to be completed in a hurry. And the tempo of the whole expedition was rapid, too. I don't remember any waiting. The partisans, or the organizers of the expeditions, were counting on a large return from the grain groups. Each person meant fifteen kilos for the troops. It wasn't so certain that we could hold the mill.

I think our group immediately set out more or less in single file. That was the style then. Anyway, you couldn't walk any other way. Through those cellars, holes, and vaults of Krucza. Then under Aleje.

So, we were "in front of Aleje" for the first time after our

moonlight flight. That we were going to walk beyond Marszałkowska made a greater impression. For the first time. Swen and I. And several others, I think. I don't remember by what route — exactly — we reached Marszałkowska. A general debate began while we were running. Which way to go. After crossing Marszałkowska. First we were supposed to go along Złota. But the news came like a bombshell: Złota won't work. So we went via Sienna.

I think we turned somewhere into the rear of the buildings on Sienkiewicz Street. And here's where we ran across Marszałkowska. Which means first there were cellars. And people singing in them:

Under Thy protection…

Holy Mother of God…

Then crouching down. And whiz! Across that black pit. What else could you call it? Stealthily up to the barricade. I didn't see much. The pit. Marszałkowska — apparently — was under fire from the tower of the Church of the Savior. Black walls. The undersides of the tram cars. And I heard, while running by, how someone on our side (our Chmielna) was banging out the "Warszawianka" on a piano. And immediately we dived into the cellars on the other side. Here they were singing:

But deliver us from all evil…

We rushed into the next cellar.

Our Lady,

Our Lady,

Oh, Our Laaa-dy…

I remember that definitely in three cellars in a row there were three places of that same antiphon. Evidently it wasn't going very well. Since they were singing like that. Or — they were firing. Firing from that armored train. Father, whose memory I am relying on for about three times, maintains that there was a shell every seven minutes.

"Every seven?"

"So, don't you remember how we looked at our watches and that we were rushing to make it before the next one?"

"Oh, that… yes…"

But it seemed to me that the others were firing, too. In addition. Or perhaps that was all. In any case, something that represented a danger. For us who were running.

An explosion came, I think, as we ran down just past Marszałkowska. Perhaps in those cellars. Then we ran out. Onto the surface. The beginning of Sienna. Only — what that street and that whole area looked like! The street, and those sides, and those backs! Just why were we running along it?! Well, simply because everything was buried. Including the passageways. Bombed out. And piled up

some two stories high! As far as the eye could see. Because to the left. And to the right. Here and there something protruded. But it didn't correlate with life. We didn't imagine that under that something there could be people. But there were. The ones who'd survived. Because I thought that I should drop in on Staszek P. At least to find out. He lived in those left-hand "Tatra Mountains." But, in the first place, our group was running. And second, I was certain he wasn't there. Because how could he be? Practically certain. My experience in Stare Miasto somewhere down below suggested the possibility that they were there. But common sense prevailed. And we ran on. Ran along the spine of a mountain chain of ruins. There was even a trail. Red. Of bricks. With a sprinkling of gray. Father remembers that I stumbled over something while running and tore open my boot.

"And?"

"Nothing, somehow you kept running."

I don't remember this.

Only that running. To catch up. Shouting to them. And the ever-mounting terror. At one point something exploded. Slammed into us. Only not into the three of us. The tail of the group. Confusion. In one jump we dove under the wall. To the right. Because there was some kind of wall there. And we made a turn into something. A street, I think, Komitetowa. I don't know if that made sense. We waited a minute beyond the wall. Perhaps because of that tail. It was necessary to help. Those who were closer helped. We ran on at once. Still along Sienna. Or maybe already on Śliska? But Śliska was just as horrible. And also covered with mountains. So it came down to one thing. As fast as possible!

Under Twarda there was a tunnel. Under the street. Very narrow. One person wide. With pipes in the center. So that you had to slide through it. Farther on — I don't remember what was there. Also mountains. Running. And a second identical tunnel under Żelazna. I think we were running along Pańska. Because over there — there were those tunnels. Again, I don't remember what was beyond Żelazna. The mill was nearby. On the right. But first we ran into a courtyard. And from that courtyard up a huge ladder. Across the wall. Really high. And from there we came down on a second ladder.

"Faster! faster!" they urged.

We went right down into the mill, or rather into a swarm of people in the yard. And onto a loading platform. That platform was the goal. Because the sacks of grain were there. Hundred-kilo sacks. Maybe there was something like a line. Or maybe not. I think we jumped right onto the platform. Tore open the sacks. And loaded up. Or rather poured into our own sacks. Assisting each other. The platform was high and long, because it seemed to me that I was on

Towarowa at the branch railroad. I knew that I wasn't. But at moments I think I almost forgot. And I was amazed that it wasn't Towarowa. I held the sacks. Or supported them from the bottom. I think I was under the platform. Father and Swen came in. And poured for each other. There were huge shovels for pouring. Swen and Father quarreled a bit. Hastily. Only for a moment. I don't know about what. Everyone here was quarreling. I don't know about what. And pouring. Probably about doing it more quickly. Because they were hurrying us.

"Go! Go!"

But everyone wanted as much as possible. And they were already firing. In addition, German bombers showed up. They started shooting at us. There was confusion. Suddenly Soviet fighter planes. They drove the others off. We were saved.

Now with the sacks on our backs we walked over to the wall with the ladder. I took only thirty or thirty-five kilos. Swen took more. And Father took the most. They outwitted themselves with their good intentions. Swen was afraid of hunger. After all, he didn't have too much to eat. And Father thought it was also for others. Both of them, after all, were eager to share. For Swen that was obvious. Father, on his side, had a family instinct. And in general an instinct for hoarding. On the other hand they had heavy, horrible loads. They could barely make it up the ladder. Those ladders were awful for such loads. They swayed. And how could you keep your balance with such a load? And here others are rushing you. Why weren't there holes in the wall here? I don't know. There must have been some reason. I remember now: Swen had thirty-five kilos. Father had more. I had thirty. I turned out to be the greatest egoist here. I was simply afraid of wheezing beneath a sack that was beyond my strength. But I wasn't afraid that I wouldn't have something later. After all, someone will give me something. We had wheat. Because there will still be some left. I think for the time being no one touched the barley (there was barley here, too). It remained in the sacks. As something inferior.

Only now we were really hindered by the tunnels under Żelazna and Twarda. We squeezed between the pipes with those sacks. And we had to help each other prop up the sacks, push them along, flatten them out and drag them through.

Beyond Twarda we passed through courtyards and holes from Pańska up to Sienna. To the courtyards of those two or three buildings in the prewar modern style. The ones that remained intact and are still standing. We knew one of them well, because the literary evenings at Teik's had been held here. In the courtyard, the one belonging to Teik's building, near a hole in the wall leading to Złota Street, we sat down, out of breath. The sun was still shining. It was hot. Some women brought out a bucket, or several buckets, with coffee and

distributed it to everyone. They were good, kindly women. It was they, I think, who told us that we could go back along Złota. That it was just a rumor that Złota was impassable. In the courtyard, this one and the one bordering on Złota, there was a lot of dug-up earth, ditches, gardens, plants, plaster. Everything mixed together. In the sunlight. And also in the coffee from the buckets. My God! How much kindness there was in Warsaw then! Simple kindness. So much!

Farther along, evidently it was so-so. On Złota. Because I don't remember anything. Crossing Marszałkowska was simply a crossing of Marszałkowska. It's different now — a return from the known. Besides which, it was important to me: to see the last western quarter of insurrectionary Śródmieście. Because it so happened that except for central and southern Powiśle (since they're northern after all!) I got to know all of Śródmieście during the uprising. The so-called district IV. So somewhere after crossing Marszałkowska at the height of Złota we continued on Złota carrying those sacks. And either in a courtyard on the corner of Złota and Zgoda, or a courtyard on the corner of Zgoda and Szpitalna, they had a post where the grain was weighed. A small courtyard or a tiny yard — triangular. Built up on three sides to a height of four or five stories. So it was safe. We waited in line. A long one. For a long time. For the scale. Manned by two or three people. And shells were pounding at us. It grew dark. Shells were still pounding. The tail joined us. Maybe not just ours. Maybe it was a different expedition, or several others. From that district. Because they'd gone out from all the accessible districts.

It was already completely dark (and warm) and shells were firing while the scale was still in operation. The line was growing smaller. Our turn came. They weighed off fifteen kilos each. And with our diminished, which is to say lightened, loads we ran under burning Aleje. Perhaps it was only now that it was burning? After the fires here? I know that the passage under it had changed in some way. Krucza was still Krucza. Familiar. Swen turned to go his way. We floundered on to Wilcza with our treasure.

I assume that it was in those grain days that hopelessness returned. Not as in August. Because they were already transporting us — in general — to Germany to work. Even — people unfit for work or with children — throughout the Generalgouvernement.[26] Hopelessness about the front. And the fate of the uprising. The Kościuszko Division had retreated. The front was standing still. And the little front, the front of the uprising, was uncertain. People said that they might drive us back from the Królewska line. Even so, I was surprised to learn that that line was being held. That, in general, so much was still held. Once I set off past Marszałkowska. To Zdzisław Ś. At the corner of Emilia Plater Street. (And here I get caught by the

fact that either crossing Marszałkowska on the expedition to the mill was not the first time. Or, if I was at Zdzisio's after the mill, it was only then that I saw the last quarter of upper Śródmieście. Quarter is also an inexact definition. Let's say — part.) So, when I ran past Marszałkowska along one of those streets. Hoża. Maybe Wspólna. I was amazed that it was possible to run past it. And then I was surprised that it was possible to walk farther. But perhaps that was only on the corner of Poznańska? No, probably not! In any case, our territory stretched as far as Emilia Plater. Or even a bit farther. Because it was a corner house. That billet. A lot of partisans. I found it easily. I also spotted Zdzisio easily. He was there. We sat down on the stairs on the ground floor. In a crowd of uniformed men. Who were either sitting or running about. And the mood was pleasant because of the pleasant weather. In addition, they were not firing at that moment. Otherwise, the mood was melancholic. Or maybe I was there twice? That time, one of two or perhaps the only time, was when we could already sense the impending failure of the uprising. We sat there. Zdzisio a step above me. In order not to block the way. We spoke very little to each other. Although we were relaxed. Zdzisio gave me a lump of sugar.

"Here."

I started sucking it immediately. At the time, treating someone to a lump of sugar was significant. That was our last meeting. Perhaps we will see each other again someday. Because we are both alive. Since that time we simply have resided in different countries.

Our return along Złota Street with the grain inspired Father and me to look in on Sabina. Sabina and Czesław lived on Złota. Past Sosnowa. So the day after the expedition, I think, we ran there. Złota looked better than those Siennas, Śliskas, Pańskas. Buildings were still standing. There were gates. We found Sabina immediately. In the shelter. Or, rather, in the cellar. Such an ordinary cellar. With a little corridor. Or, rather, in a storage bin (for potatoes). Somehow it was strangely roomy here. And peaceful. Sabina and Czesław had a door. They were living there. By themselves. They had installed a couch. And we sat with them just like guests. A carbide lamp was lit. It was evening.

We had to go back. Out onto Złota. With its iron gates. For a moment we were reminded of good times, until our heads whirled, until it smelled like a normal street. It was warm. And completely dark. And suddenly: buuuu-uu!

We jump inside a gate. A shell. It landed not far off. We rush out. Because we have to go farther. The next one. Again we take shelter. As best we can in an alcove. As if that could protect us. Once they begin to shell, they really let loose. It is obvious that they won't stop.

No point in going back. No point in waiting. We go on. It was as simple as could be. All the way to Marszałkowska. But I no longer remember what came next.

What else happened? In those days? Bartering on Krucza Street between Hoża and Wilcza developed rapidly. From one day to the next. Already on the third day it was a small bazaar. On the fourth a full-scale bazaar. On the fifth — a dense crowd. Standing. Milling about. (That stretch was "chosen," or safe, until the end.) Practically everyone held something in his hand. Anything. Anything could be exchanged, as long as it wasn't for money. Money was worth as much as garbage. It seems someone began to trade in gold. In addition to the sellers a lot of "window shoppers" were milling about, and others, like Swen and me — sightseers.

Another diversion was grinding grain. Every day the grinding increased. Like that bazaar. And also fast. Because more and more often people were dragging home grain for themselves. So that two or three days after we were there only barley was left. People were pleased with that, too. And the grinding went on. In all the shelters. From morning to night. Using all sorts of mills. Small ones, big ones. For the most part people began with small ones. Like ours. In coffee grinders. Shch-shch-shch-shch… with cranks.

But it was too slow for us. Too small. We had a lot of wheat. (We were already eating it. At every meal. Small platefuls each. With the juices. And the chaff. Very good!) We treated people who didn't have any. We gave some to the Wi. couple, because they didn't have very much to eat. So we changed from a coffee grinder to a mill for something or other, a bigger one. We borrowed it. It seems to me that the bigger one demanded more effort, since it had a larger crank and larger grinding wheels. Then Zocha went and tried to borrow a large mill from some sort-of acquaintances. But it was such a large one that it couldn't be loaned. Or moved. We had to run over there with the wheat. To grind it. Practically all of us ran over. The mill was like a mangle. It had a huge crank which moved in a vertical circle. We poured in the wheat. And kept grinding. By turns. Zocha once. Then me. Halina once. Father. We looked into the drawer. And it was just barely there in a corner. The flour. Of course, perhaps it was ground more finely. But so what if it was so slow? Again we grind. By turns. Each of us had our fill of cranking. Till we were sweaty. We looked inside. And again only the tiniest amount. We gave up on any more milling. We said thank you. We took our leave of that family. Pretending we had to, since it was almost evening. And in the morning we turned to those despised — those little— mills. For coffee. They were irreplaceable.

And so until the very end all of Śródmieście was grinding grain,

shch-shch, cooking and eating it with the chaff, with great appetite and satisfaction.

During those days of turning mills and the bazaar, after Czerniaków the Germans attacked Mokotów and Żoliborz. I remind you: September 23—Czerniaków — southern Powiśle; September 27—Mokotów fell; September 30—Żoliborz capitulated. And now the whole force of the offensive was to be directed against what remained of Śródmieście.

Once more I refute the false legends about how Żoliborz survived. And Mokotów. That nothing of the sort happened there. I remember how they both looked in 1945: not just burned-out buildings but a pile of rubble. In 1949 I was on Dworkowa when a mound of corpses (around two hundred, I think) was discovered in a blocked sewer. Where the stairs were. The grim history of the Mokotów sewers is well-known. It was precisely there and then that the worst sewer incidents occurred.

After the war, Warsaw sang the "Mokotów March" with gusto:

… after all, those August nights
and resilient arms suffice for us…
This first march
has a strange power…
Something quivers in one's breast
and sobs in one's heart…
And the trumpet plays, tra ta ta
Tra-tatata-ta-ta…

But back to the point: I was not in Mokotów nor in Żoliborz. Others were. They survived or they didn't survive. Those who experienced their own emotions, hells, and reality there know what it was like. And have already described it. And will describe it again.

Żoliborz, I think, awaits its history. Because Mokotów has its own great uprising tradition. As does practically every district. Of left-bank Warsaw. Let us take a walk from the Vistula to the Vistula — north to south — like a fan:

Żoliborz.

Powązki — here I know very little (lost on August 4, I think).

Wola — what happened is well-known.

Ochota. Zieleniak, the famous former farmer's market, where people who'd been rounded up sat day and night; once a volley of rifle fire was emptied into the line at the pump; and those rapes — I know this from various people and from Ludwik, too, because he was driven there — he, Ludmila, the whole family — that every so often one of the women came back to her family's "allotment," to her husband, howling, because she'd been raped.

Mokotów — see above.

Czerniaków — well-known.

After the capitulation of Żoliborz on September 30 there was fine weather, heat. (Don't be surprised that I suddenly remember something. That's how it is. And I make no corrections because I want my struggling with memory and separateness of the districts to be apparent.) Only Śródmieście remained. And what was there in Śródmieście? Krucza Street? With the side streets off it? Or Złota? Even that's not so sure.

And the rest?

Rubble.

The rest was gone.

Then what?

A couple of streets that were one-half or one-quarter intact, which vaguely resembled streets. That's how it seemed then. Because now even they wouldn't seem like streets. No way.

The mill was emptied. The grain that we carried out for the troops, which had seemed like so much, had already been exhausted. There weren't all that many weapons, either. Anyway, what kind of weapons were they? Laughter in the hall. It was well-known that at any moment the bombers would move, the cows, the armored train, all sorts of artillery, tanks — against that Śródmieście. Against Krucza. So, what was it all?

A pile of ruins? Of bombed-out cellars? And a pile of corpses?

I'm playing the sage unnecessarily. Long ago others created history out of this, made deductions from it and proclaimed them. And the thing is known. Yes, I'm speaking for myself — a layman. And for others. Also laymen. To the extent that we can speak because we were there. Laymen and non-laymen. All condemned together to a single history. After various September rumors we felt more and more hope. For survival. Maybe we are not condemned? If only we can prevent that catastrophe from happening in this area? Perhaps it was worthwhile to defend, to rescue whatever and whomever could be rescued. Maybe at this point someone will smile pityingly. Now? After so much? Well, yes.

We were alive. Still. That man with the torn-off cheek was walking along Krucza with his cheek already sewed back on, without a bandage. Capitulation hung in the air. Sunshine, too. Dust, too. Or, rather, heat with explosions and rubble. Because they kept firing! firing!

I, too, ran straight to Żurawia that day, I think. To Swen. Upstairs this time. Because for some reason I imagined that Swen might be upstairs. No. That was the second day, I think. I couldn't have thought that. That on September 30 they would be on the second floor. And yet it seems I could. I think it was September 30. Because there was

still a sense of direct danger, from the sky. And there was already something of the end, of a fiasco, of armistice. Of a thunderbolt. If you'll pardon the metaphor. Because there wasn't just talk about capitulation. There was — it seems to me — an official statement about forthcoming negotiations.

September 30. I am on my way to Żurawia. It's bright in the courtyard. There's sunlight at the exit from the stairs, the apartments. Perhaps the other doors weren't open; only that one, on the second floor, the Szu. family's, was wide open, straight into an enfilade. Something was rumbling. There was something lying everywhere. One could sense a lot of people. Where? Below? Here it was shimmering with emptiness. In the sunlight. Here — in the stairwell. It was early, before sunset. And I was pulled, drawn, into that azure by singing. By one individual. Hoarsely and maniacally. But piously. In a virile rural style. A dismissively cellar style. Although it was coming from the second floor. As it turned out. And from that enfilade. So that I wanted to be mistaken about hearing it. Someone at the Szus.' But — still… I enter the first door. Why? I want to find out about Swen. The singing is becoming more shrill with every moment. A second door. It's verging on maniacal. Here it is! Well I can see, because I keep walking — someone is sitting in a chair, in the center. Now I see that it's Pan Szu., the elder. With his back to me, to the stairs, his face to the window, the courtyard, and a point opposite. What is in the room? Space. Everything has been carried out. Only that singing. A howl. Properly, with pauses: "You are absolutely beautiful, my friend"—half spoken, as it should be. Again howling. Interlacing — pause. Professionally. And again: "As the hands of the clock are moved back."

What would you want from the text of the Hours, from the intent, from stubborn concentration? I was stunned. It was in truth the Liturgy of the Hours. I walk over to Pan Szu. Who is sitting motionless in his chair. With his hands in his lap. And celebrating. And nothing. He doesn't turn around. Doesn't interrupt himself. Doesn't see. Doesn't hear. He sings. I stand behind him. Should I ask? No?

"Excuse me, is…"—Nothing.

"Excuse me, sir, is…"—Nothing.

"Is Swen here?" Nothing. He continues howling, motionless.

"Isn't there anyone? Here? Are they??? No?! Downstairs??"—loudly, and nothing. Stupid Miron. Pan Szu. howls. Miron runs. Walks around to the front. Of Pan Szu. Who has his eyes fixed on the window, the sky; his hands as above (lowered); he sings (howls) and nothing. I walked around him and, embarrassed — exactly, embarrassed — I walked out as fast as I could. I think I didn't find Swen that day; the singing howled after me all the way down the

stairs, all through the courtyard, and even farther, I think.

But that house on Żurawia was strange. And under stress, Pan Szu. was celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours for the end of the uprising.

That was Saturday. They were still smashing; mortars, “cows” (not bombs); at night, too — I don’t remember with what, we were used to it. People were sleeping in crumpled bedding in cellars under the protection of Secession architecture, under that “credenza”—23 Wilcza, which survived, remains standing to this day. The morning was sweltering. Sunshine. Still. Without change. A dry summer. And it was Sunday. Which no one knew. Today, too. Instead we knew that it was already October. October… October… Unbelievable. The third month? The third. Then which day? The sixty-second. But then suddenly in the morning everything grew still. The main front was quiet. The Germans were quiet. And we were quiet. Silence. Such as there had not been since August 1. Could it be that we knew this beforehand, or that we figured it out immediately, or was an announcement made right away — a truce until nightfall and negotiations? An announcement, I think. So it was the end? Really? It was known that if they were negotiating they would agree. It was believed that nothing dreadful awaited us; people wanted to believe in that, because they’d had their fill of the uprising and of war in general and of hatred and killing and dying. Suddenly — everyone— wanted — to — live! To live! To walk! To go outside! To look around! At the sunlight. Normally.

And at once everyone started coming out from all the cellars, vaults, holes.

Onto the streets!

Not mourning. Nor a holiday. Who knows what. Everything at once. Simply the population crawling out onto the surface.

And we went out, too. The whole cellar. Onto Krucza. There was such congestion already on Krucza that you could scarcely squeeze past. But who was in a hurry? Our whole clan walked out: Halina, Zocha, Stacha, Father, Swen (because he’d come), and I, and Pani Trafna with her pocketbook under her arm. Truly, it was a holiday. Why deny it? We walked with the crowd. And we passed a crowd of people going in the opposite direction.

The crowd poured out of all the gates, courtyards, rubble, openings, and side streets. There was no lack of rubble. All of Krucza was barricaded, dug up. Covered with rubble and crowds. And sunshine, too. And the quiet, sprinkled with the local commotion of emerging “onto the city.” On the corner, acquaintances, both close and casual, met. Passed each other. Chatted. Stood for a while. Looked at the sky. Everyone — men and women. On the corner of

Nowogrodzka we ran into Irena P. with her mother and her aunts, too, I think. There were excavations here, too. Barricades. We stopped. We were talking about something and looking upward. And suddenly way, way up in the blue sky Swen and I saw two storks flying. October 1? I pointed them out; the others looked and said nothing; they kept on talking. Then immediately goodbye and onward. With the crowd past Aleje, or rather up to Aleje by way of the underground passageway.

We were drawn to Chmielna, to our old junk. In general we were drawn to walk — to walk — to look — to check. There was such a commotion and confusion of impressions; and those crowds, and the sun; and because there was silence and so many things along the way, the crowding, passing others, that I don't remember what came next. We dropped in at 32 Chmielna. That I know. Inside the gate. The annex was standing. I remember that already at the gate we saw that our annex was standing. We saw the second floor. The third. And the fourth. Ours. And our windows. Undamaged. Open. Hooked back. As we had left them. We ran upstairs. Everything was bathed in sunlight, in the dry heat, in transparent light. The cats weren't there. Because yes — everything was there. Unchanged. The cats' food, too. Where are the cats? We run downstairs to the janitor. The janitor tells us that one day someone observed the cats going out through the window onto the roof and they never came back. They all stayed at Chmielna. Only Swen and I went farther, to the square, to Szpitalna and, via some other street, left to Jasna. Because through Napoleon (Partisans) Square. Right after the square things became horrible.

And got worse. Ruins after ruins. Mounds after mounds. I don't know what we expected. After all, it was known, I think, that these stubs of Krucza or Wilcza — were just that and nothing more. But still something here and there — half a building, one and a half buildings. So that they no longer held any meaning.

Anyway. It was certainly what Adam said when I told him about that day: "Because suddenly a return to normality, and suddenly there's no city, no buildings, well… despair…"

Yes, that's it exactly, that this is finally peace. The end. Everything over. Two hundred thousand people lying under the ruins. Along with Warsaw.

It was probably the worst on Jasna. We were walking on monstrous mounds of rubble. Now high. Now low. Here it was empty. And suddenly Swen started crying. At the top of his voice. For the whole street to hear. It tore me apart. Anyway, I howled, too. Maybe a little more quietly. We reached Dąbrowski Square. Ruins on all four sides and in the center. And emptiness. And that sky. With a concealed echo. Because it was sundown. And something was firing somewhere.

In the Saxon Gardens. And again silence. We turned back. The firing began again. During the night there were some operations. But not large ones.

The morning of October 2, 1944, everything grew quiet. This time for good. Capitulation. The end of the uprising. Announced. Starting today everyone is to leave. By October 9 it has to be empty. The entire city. The partisans are laying down their arms. People capable of working will be transported to the Reich. Invalids and sole guardians of children will be transported throughout the Generalgouvernement. It seems the sun wasn't exceptionally bright that day since we ran outside quickly: Zocha, Father, Halina, Swen, and I, this time to Piękna — just so as to be closer to Marszałkowska, to get there faster, to check the first people who were leaving, it was all somehow dull. It was hard to speak about the first people who were leaving here. Marszałkowska, if you looked to the right, was swarming. People… people… in line… already waiting. Already up to the exit, with bundles, in family groups. Marszałkowska was dug up, blocked off. With barricades, ditches. So the crowd assembled on the other side across from us. My eye caught the sign "Imperial" (cinema) above the crowd and in the crowd I noticed Wawa. Wearing an enormous hat. We looked to the left: The crowd here had already spread out across the entire width of the street. We walked up to the intersection of Marszałkowska, Koszykowska, and Śniadeckich along our edge, from our side. One exit was right here, from here across Śniadeckich to Polytechnic Square. And the other was via Aleje or Towarowa to Zawisza Square. Crowds were approaching from farther along Marszałkowska from the Church of the Savior. From Koszykowa, on the left, even greater crowds. They all had either packed in together with several groups of really poor people on Śniadeckich and were moving about there slowly or standing in place, teeming, swarming about, or looking around, running about, dashing back and forth just as we did, or they were returning from Mokotów Field, from the garden plots, with beets, carrots, parsnips, pumpkins, armfuls of freshness, and those leaves, aromas, colors, and a greedy haste to carry them to one's own pot in order to cook them as quickly as possible and devour them! The first time! Such a long time since something like this; these parades from Mokotów Field kept growing larger and larger; people were running, yanking, carrying, cooking, eating, and again running, yanking, and eating, just to remain here for at least a couple of days more, to rest up a bit, eat, and only then walk out.

A lot of people, already loaded down for the journey, were milling about at the main departure point. They sat on bundles. Searched for relatives. The remaining ones. Who were lost. Who had

promised to appear. Valises. Children. Some lay down in entire camps. As if for a night's stay. At the Koszykowa—Śniadeckich intersection. In the very center, at the confluence of the five streets, was a large bomb crater, surrounded, people sitting everywhere. Right. The truth. About those bomb craters. Every so often I recall something important by appearance or sound.

The entire departure went slowly. And resembled a gathering for the Last Judgment. I think it was right then and there that we decided to leave on the second day, October 3. There was no reason to delay. What will be, will be. Perhaps it won't be so bad. It's clear that they'll take us all to work in the Reich. If only not to the west. And not to a *Bauer* (infamous slaving away and starvation):

On a Bauer howls a dog
Fed on slops meant for a hog.
And for dinner tripe in a bowl
To make him bark at every Pole.
oj… lala lala-la-la
tra-lala-lala-la-la
alalalalalala-lala
alalala-lala-lala…

We were supposed to leave together. Pani Jadwiga and Pan Stanisław. The entire Wi. family, with their children, Józia, the mother, Jadzia. All of us. Pani Trafna. Zocha knew about Pani Trafna. And the Woj. couple also knew that she was a Jew. Many Jews were supposed to leave with the Poles as non-Jews. Others, if they wanted to, remained behind in the ruins. But in general Jews trusted Varsovians at that time. The situation, after all, made it easier to trust, not to recognize, and not to think about it.

My meeting with Jews, with Kuba's whole family:

Kuba was a charming, slender, simply beautiful young Jew. He wore a cap and high boots. And he was tall, had splendid black hair and splendid white teeth. I knew him. I and others. He was tremendously popular. He walked around laughing. He was very flirtatious. But not excessively. He knew himself. And he was charming. The last time I met him was in Dąbrowski Square, where I live today; it was summer, June, lightning, a storm; it was pouring; we were standing under a roof and Kuba was laughing at the lightning with those teeth of his. And then once again, when he was carrying a sack or something for his family. Then he disappeared. Which was normal. We would mention him and think about how things had perhaps gone badly for him. And suddenly now, October 2, we're standing there, walking around in our Wilcza — Krucza courtyards. We're moving about on the mounds. Because there were a lot of them. And pits, too. We're deliberating. What. How. Who will leave with

whom. I look to the side. Those white teeth laughing. Like an ear of corn — as Ludwik says. Beneath black hair. That same splendid profile. I look and don't believe it. But he laughs. I run to him.

"Kuba!"

"How are you?!"

"Is it really you?"

He smiles. Broadly.

"How did you survive?"

"Very well."

"Where are you? How are things? What are you doing? Are you alone? Are you leaving? No? Kuba! Really…"

Kuba, with complete trust in me and in Father, who is standing nearby, and Stanisław, says, "We're here in the ruins. On Wilcza. The whole family. The whole time: twenty-six people. We're set up. What about you? Are you leaving?"

"Well, it seems so."

"You're really leaving? For Germany? What for?"

"Well, really, we don't know exactly why."

Because actually Halina felt like remaining in the ruins. I did, too. Father and Zocha half agreed. But somehow it was decided to leave. And here is Kuba persuading us: "Stay with us. We're well off.

You won't be badly off. We have what to eat. We have supplies. They

won't find us."

"Father," I say, "maybe we should?"

"How should I know?" Father began to think it over.

"Stay with us."

I began to yield to Kuba. I liked the idea. Of staying. They had experience. Kuba was clever, splendid. I really wanted to. Very much. Halina, too. Because I ran to her right away. I told Kuba: "Well, we'll see."

"Stay with us."

Halina and I were decided. We absolutely didn't want to leave for Germany for the unknown, for labor. Maybe for something worse? People were counting on being rid of these Germans before long. But the devil knows how long. Maybe half a year more? Wouldn't it be better to stay here in the ruins?

"Who'll find us?"

Zocha reconsidered the situation, too. And Father. For a moment it almost seemed as if we would. But then we began to be afraid. Perhaps it was dangerous. If they find us they'll destroy us. But if they transport us (if we leave), then it will be to labor and only that; to life and not to death.

We didn't want to break up again. Although in the end it turned

out otherwise. Because foolish breaking apart began, not staying together. By degrees. More and more. It started with Swen. Instead of leaving with us, he and Zbyszek (in case he wanted to leave as a civilian), then no. Somehow we didn't make plans. We didn't come to an agreement. It was my fault. Halina's, too, a little. But how was Halina at fault? I was! Sloppiness. Mostly due to missing each other. And not meeting up in time. That day Swen was still at our place. Or I was at his. Was it because Swen was alienated because of what Stacha had said then about the water, and by this and that, and other such trifles? So what? I didn't act. And I'm the one who lost. Swen wasn't doing well in September. With living. With washing. With eating. Everything went badly. And drafts, too. Because he'd had such a place. Despite the heat. In 1939 Ludwik had stood in a gateway on Kercelak between two fires and had shivered from cold in the draft from the flames.

Pan Szu., the man from the Hours, hadn't gone mad at all. For now he and his family were preparing whole jars of lard. Their son had a suitcase full of money. Just in case. What I know now I learned many months afterward. After meeting Swen and Mother. His. Because we had somehow lost each other here, drifted apart. Swen left with the Szus. For Ursus. They were forced out. Old people were grouped separately. The Szus.' son, the one with the money, and Swen were shoved into a freight car for a labor transport. Except it was an open carriage. They ride. And ride. It's night. Somewhere. Far away. Still the Generalgouvernement. The train is rounding a bend. Slowing down. They jump out. First someone else. A shot. What? — Who knows? Then Szu. flings his valise full of money, Swen flings his bundle. And they themselves jump! Jump! Success. They run to a village. Schwanzdorf is nearby. The Generalgouvernement. Kieleckie. In Polish: Ogonowice… They walk up to a cottage. A night's lodging. Questions. Lights on behind covered windows. Mama, Aunt Uff., and Celina. And Lusia with Pani Rymińska. They're all here. Unbelievable. But that's what happened.

Our Starówka family: Swen's mother, Aunt, Celina, Lusia with Mareczek, and Lusia's mother had left when the Germans attacked, several hours after our departure for the sewers. Grenades were being tossed somewhere nearby. But it wasn't so very dangerous. At least not near them. They were transported to Pruszków or Ursus. Swen's mother and Aunt were in no danger. Celina faced forced labor. (In 1942 she had been in Majdanek for four months.) They disguised her. That is, they put on her whatever came to hand and covered her up. With kerchiefs. To make her ugly and old. And that's how they got by. Through the selection procedure. All of them passed as unfit for work. To the Generalgouvernement with them.

Let us return to the main scene of departure. The final one. To the so-called exodus. The day of capitulation dragged on and on. Some people left. Others made preparations. Others thought things over. Some passed by. Consulted. And everyone walked about. Meetings multiplied. Gatherings. And indecision multiplied, too. Stupid separations. Sheer idiocy. Lots of neither here nor there. So what else: collecting water, as much as possible, for a great washing before the great exodus. All Warsaw began bathing. In families. In shelter groups. In every possible vessel. I don't remember what happened about shaving. No doubt whoever had what was needed to do it with, shaved. After yesterday's holiday of crawling out into the street, today was a day of preparation. We put off our bathing until evening. Meanwhile a discussion began about what to take with us. Whatever could be moved. And what to leave behind as useless. Everyone held such counsels. The Wi. family suddenly had more kasha than they all could carry. We had a lot of wheat that had to be left behind. At least some of it. There were those who had nothing. But a great many people had to leave something that would have come in handy, either food or clothing. It didn't make sense to drag it along. After deciding what to take we began to discuss what to take it in. The best would be if each person took something on his back and carried in his hand whatever else he wanted. Father and Zocha came up with the idea of sewing backpack-sacks for the five of us. On straps, à la knapsacks. The bags out of canvas. And the straps out of canvas. Because there was no leather. But there was canvas. And a sewing machine was found. Zocha, Halina, and Stacha began to sew those bags. I started rushing around looking for a supply of notebooks and pencils. In a corner of Pani Rybkowska's apartment I found a bulging closet. Completely stuffed with stacks of notebooks. Perhaps it hadn't bulged originally. But only began bulging from those notebooks. It was musty. The notebooks were old. So I quickly tore out the pages that hadn't been written on. Just at that moment Pani Rybkowska walked in.

"What are you doing? Those are my deceased daughter's school notebooks."

"Yes, but…"

"Excuse me…"

My yes buts were of no help. Since it wasn't at all obvious why I should be tearing out pages from old notebooks, there was no way to convince her. Even if I were to treat them as souvenirs. I decided to continue ripping them out after Pani R. left. After all, I had to have something to write on. For the road. And for the transport. As soon as she left I went on ripping.

I think we separated for a while after the bags were sewn. Did we

go back to Chmielna again? I know that Father and I went to Złota. We had an urge to see Sabina once more, to say goodbye. It was afternoon, overcast, but without rain. The haziness came not so much from above as from below, it was so crowded with people in motion. After all, people were also leaving in that direction — via Zawisza Square. And they were passing each other just the same, returning, discussing. The buildings were black and gray. At the same time. Like the crowd. Torn-off balconies. And suddenly in those balconies — because it's hard to say on them — there were people. Heads in the windows. It was astonishing that people were looking down into the street. It was a long time since they'd been upstairs. Every so often someone walked by dragging a wounded person on a stretcher. Or a sick man.

Sabina and Czesław were bustling about in their little cellar. Calm. They ate something. Or intended to eat. They had no intention of leaving tomorrow or the day after. The later the better. When it would empty out completely. Why rush? And they left on October 9 or 10. After all, Sabina, Czesław, and Czesław's sister had apartments on one of the upper floors. So I went upstairs and stood on the slashed balcony. The crowd was passing. Crookedly. Massed together. Avoiding obstacles. To the left. Now to the right. Those in the middle. The street was noisy. A drunken-insane tone was mixed up in all of this. Loud. Nearer and nearer. A speech? Well yes, a speech. I noticed in the crowd — but somewhat above them, because he seemed to be walking but also seemed to be stopping on the mounds — a drunkard. Unless he was a madman. He was haranguing the crowd: "Pee-ople… Where are you going to? Pee-ople! Napoleon has already declared…"

No one listened. The speech was a trifle peculiar.

We went out from Sabina's place and joined the swarm. To Krucza. While it was still light. To bathe.

This was a major process. Long. By turns. In a basin, in water warmed on all four burners. Everyone bathed. Halina, Zocha, Stacha, I, Stanisław, Jadwiga, Papa.

The Third Day of the Holidays, that seeming metaphor, was drawing near. But only seeming. I sensed it then already. And I wasn't the only one. The day of capitulation ended. Which in the morning had been the last, the sixty-third day of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

Tanks across Marszałkowska,

Tanks across Nowy Świat…

….

Do you remember the July night…

….

Skip to the left, skip to the right…

….

All Warsaw will shout out hello to us…

….

Arm in arm across Mokotów…

….

To arms, Jesus and Mary, to…

….

Under Thy protection…

….

Fearless you'll sit astride the fierce lion…

Our heads were spinning.

October 3, Tuesday, we went to Chmielna once more. People were walking around all the time, preparing for the exodus, going out, meeting, bringing back beets and carrots from Mokotów Field. We, too, were really still going in circles. The Bałturkiewiczes, the landlords of the billet on the corner of Zgoda, took us down to their storeroom so we could get sufficient clothing. I don't know if that's when I got a coat or even whether I got it from Zocha and Father or from them. I did get winter boots from them. For the exodus. I wasn't the only one. The whole family rooted around in the cellar. Among the shoes. I was deeply moved by the fact that these people continually were concerned about others. I left the manuscript of one of my plays in the coal bin in this cellar. It was never found. The door to Chmielna was locked with a key. Unnecessarily. The house was burned down by the Germans. Afterward. But who knew that it would become rubble, that some months later only Father and I would be here? That we would come here with a brush and a pot of wet paint and write in large letters:

ZOCHA, HALINA, STACHA

WE ARE AT 37 POZNAŃSKA APT. 5

In boots, coats, with something (ski caps, no doubt, because that's what was worn then) on our heads, we crossed Krucza for the last time. Crowded. I think Swen dropped in on us once more. Anyway, we did see each other. Settled for a stupid parting. Neither saying goodbye nor not saying goodbye.

At the last moment Father and I took our documents, Halina's diploma, a camera, and my notes (a play about the uprising, not the same as the one on Zgoda Street), written on Kapitulna Street paper. To bury them. To the cellar, or rather, the shelter at 21 Wilcza. People hadn't been in the shelters for two days now. We went down. It was black. Empty. We wrapped the camera in rags. The papers — together — into a tin box. We dug a small hole. Covered it over. And tamped it down. After our return in February we dug it up. They were there. Other things, on Miodowa, on Zgoda, which we had covered carefully with bricks, were sodden. Swen also went there, by himself. And none

of his things were there, either.

Finally everyone placed a large white cloth sack on his back. Sewn onto straps. And we stepped outside. We. The Wojs., the entire Wi. family. Down Piękna. To Marszałkowska. Here the crowd was already growing denser. And in this crowd we stumbled along to the intersection of Śniadeckich, Koszykowa, and Marszałkowska with the above-mentioned bomb crater in the middle (where people had spent the night). Today it was somewhat easier to enter the stream. (It *was* a stream.) The Śniadeckich stream. The main stream of the exodus. It seems to me that the weather was not completely sunny. But it was warm. Śniadeckich had walls on both sides, partly burned, somewhat destroyed, partly intact; at any rate, it looked like a street. We walked slowly. Because people were walking crowded together across the whole width of the street. In addition you had to take care not to step into a hole in the roadway or onto stretchers with the wounded. We walked and walked. Although it's not a long street. At times to the left or to the right, or in front of us, a small space opened up. Then people hurried to catch up. Or turned left. Or right. No one knew why. Something was said. People looked. What's up ahead. But ahead — only people and more people. A single sound arose from all these people together. One was inside the sound, in its center. And one made sounds oneself. With one's feet. By talking. The sound came in waves. Every so often a groan, a cry broke to the surface. Sometimes stretchers would pass us. The wave could be felt literally. Also a sense of floating. Which was actually an ebbing away.

The walls of Śniadeckich Street were coming to an end. Any minute now. Any minute. Then the turning off into Polytechnic Square. Here the echoes changed. And one entered a rapid turmoil. Stretcher after stretcher hastily pushed their way out from the crowd. The Germans' shouts. Ambulances driving up. Automobiles. The loading of the sick and wounded. Green uniforms. Hitlerite. Tattered. A lot of them. Everything against the background of the barricade that cut across the square. A white canvas lay over the barricade. The barricade only went halfway across. Farther down and to the side— automobile traffic. And Germans. Those who were receiving us. As we approached the barricade one of the German officers stared at us attentively, his head raised. He stared at us one by one. One moment at me. He walked up to me. And quickly frisked me from head to toe. And already he was standing off to the side, watching and rushing up to the next people. But not so often. I was surprised then that he picked me out. As a suspicious person. Or rather one with a hidden weapon. After all, the partisans were supposed to be the last to leave. And they were to lay down their arms here. At the barricade. And that's how it happened. Twenty-two thousand. October 9. Those who

were leaving as civilians discarded everything that might smack of a uniform. And no one had any intention of carrying a weapon with him. What for? Now? Obviously, they didn't trust us. Now I am not surprised that he frisked me. They didn't trust the young. And I was twenty-two years old then… That I was dragging along with my family, in the crowd, with a sack on my back, didn't mean a thing… In our own way we must have looked strange then. Civilians. Partisans, too. They weren't, after all, so very different from each other. All the people who were getting out of Warsaw then resembled each other and were absolutely unlike other people.

But perhaps that day it was cloudy and rainy? There was automobile traffic. Around the barricade and into Nowowiejska it sounded wet. As if the roadway were slightly wet. That's how I see it. And right after that, I think, a red-brick hospital. On the left. Brick facing. Because it, too, was slippery… That's possible. But no. I see it, too, as wet. No one paid any attention to it. At all. We were too preoccupied with leaving. For the world. Whatever it might be. Not so certain. That world. But with hope. And for the time being not so distant. But it already seemed — beyond the barricade — distant. No one wanted to go beyond the distant world. That's obvious. The Generalgouvernement — that was the prize. A great one. But people like me had no reason to count on it. Unless we were to run away somewhere, from Pruszków, on the road, from the train.

They intended to ship us off to the Reich. The Germans gave the impression of being knowledgeable, organized, sure of themselves. To the last. Impressive — I'd like to say. Such a tradition. It had been. And under Hitler, even worse. Besides which, they were shocked by our numbers. That so many of us were leaving. After all, so many had perished. So many had already been driven out before this. After the collapse of a district. A street. From various parts of Warsaw. But still — so many remained. We ourselves were amazed. That there were so many of us. Ahead of us, into infinity, a line. And that line filled the width of the street. Into infinity, because it was hard to speak of its beginning. Behind us — it was hard to speak of its end. The tail of the line walked out on October 9. In the exodus that followed our total capitulation.

From where did we get so much optimism? After all, the transports from Warsaw had been bad. Transports from the ghetto in chlorine-treated freight cars in which people died. Transports to the camps. Transports to forced labor, now that was good fortune. After all no one ever knew what or how. My uncle from Bielańska, Aunt Olimpia-Limpcia's husband, was deported to Auschwitz on August 31. That's why I said "that poor Stach." Limpcia received a tin with his ashes. Perhaps we thought we had a good chance because there was

such a mass of us. Like those ants in the woods in Buchnik near Jabłonna. Which I saw before the war; we were near the highway then, the woods went off to the left and somewhere there one walked a long way to the Vistula; we wake up in the morning and there's a noise; we rush out: the Vistula had come to us, a flood; we look under our feet: a stream is flowing past, becoming wider and wider, it's here, it's there, closer and closer; it's growing broader by the minute; until suddenly a great sphere comes floating, made of ants, and floats past; I don't know if they survived, or if only the ones on the bottom didn't, or if they all drowned gradually. They were counting on something and must have formed a ball immediately; or perhaps they pushed by turns into the center? Like those people in *Miracle in Milan*?[27] In one burst of sunshine very early in the morning they rush out from their freezing sleep, gather into a pile, each wants to get into the center, and they're constantly pressing in centripetally; Ludwik just waved it off dismissively because he had experienced it without the metaphor at the Zieleniak camp — the first nights of the uprising were wet and cold and they were on bare cobblestones.

The feeling that "since there are so many of us somehow we'll get through" can be misleading. Ever since the ghetto I don't believe it.

So, we were walking on Nowowiejska. There was no choice. Choice was before Śniadeckich. We could have stayed with Kuba's family in the ruins. Under the mounds of Sienna, Śliska, Pańska. But we didn't stay. We walked. Slowly. We got there. To the intersection. With Aleje Niepodległości.

Here the stream of the line turned left. To Wawelska. Or rather, to Mokotów Field. And again to the right. Along the edge of the field. On Wawelska. There was a smell of carrots in the breeze. Greenery. The sun broke through. The line ahead of us dragged on and on. You could see far into the distance. For there was a distant view. On the right, burnt-out villas and the elegance of the Staszic colony with its garden plots and two-story houses in the gardens, and smaller ones. Everything empty, long ago. We were walking very slowly. We even stopped at times, because bottlenecks were created, jams. Every few yards an escort shuffled alongside us. I think they were accompanying us. Or perhaps one escort passed us on to another? They definitely were walking for several segments. These men were from the Wehrmacht. Different from the ones at the barricade. They shouted without hostility. With humor. In gibberish. They picked carrots, tomatoes. They called to the women: "Marijaa! Marijaa!" And handed them what they had picked. The Warsaw "Marijas" accepted it and ate. They said something in response in a contrived language.

At one bottleneck we began sitting down. The Wehrmacht officers allowed it, very politely. As soon as it was unblocked, they started

shouting again.

"Hey, Marijaa!" And something else, about our moving on.

Wawelska cheered people up. Because Mokotów Field smelled fresh, and no bombs were falling, and those Wehrmacht officers. We could see that Germans, too, are people — as Mickiewicz's Konrad Wallenrod said after the words "Enough vengeance already."[28]

Perhaps I should describe more fully how Warsaw looked from the outskirts, as if in its entirety and as if we were bidding it farewell. Because that's where Warsaw's city limits were at that time. Mokotów was invisible. It had broken off earlier. And Mokotów Field, after hooking around protruding Grójecka and old Ochota (also smaller, shorter) went on and on, who knows where to, wide open, to Koluszki and Konstantynopol. So, Warsaw from its outer limits. Is that how we looked around then? A little. But after all, we had just left from the center of what stuck out here. And it couldn't make an impression. I am exaggerating a bit. On one side, Mokotów Field, a lot of growing things. And no people to be seen. On the right side, streets, buildings stick up, one after the other, in a row — also everything dark and empty. But down the center, from front and back, we come. We are walking out and walking out. We sit for a while. Move on. And talk. We are all walking along the same street. Which was not so common. After Żwirki and Wigury, which at that time didn't have many streets, we began entering the center of Ochota. Between destruction on the right and destruction on the left. There should be movement on Grójecka. But I don't remember. The others of us from Zawisza Square — no. Arterial movement of German troops — no. I remember our route. Cutting across Grójecka. I remember the cobblestones and tram tracks under our feet. Ruins. The smell of burning. In our nostrils. In our eyes. I remember how we looked around. But I don't remember at what. We exited into a small ruined area of Kopińska Street — what remained of small low buildings, wooden houses, carriage houses with stables. Kopińska had narrow cobblestones converging into a steep loaf-shaped slope. Onto two gutters with boards across them for a driveway into each entrance gate. It ended abruptly. Soon; that is — it went on, but already as a passageway to the Western Station; across a field with vegetable gardens, as if it were still Mokotów Field. One could see earthen mounds, platforms, cars. Freight cars. A lot of them. A curving line of people. And at the end, against the background of the platforms, a scene of mass confusion. Beyond the end, beyond the tracks and the platforms, the ruins of Wola and the rotundas and tank of the gasworks must have stuck out. I don't know if it was then that we saw our last view of Warsaw.

There are sidings. Shouts. Movement. Masses of people and things, crowded together. We are not far from the platforms. We push

our way through very slowly. At the end of Kopińska, we can suddenly see a group of Poles. They are carrying shovels, sacks, bags, onions, tomatoes, potatoes. Near us are Krauts. Railway workers. Platform attendants. Also Krauts. We draw even with the Poles, the ones who were digging. Only one German is guarding them, and not very strictly at that. The Poles are carrying their sacks on their backs, their shovels in their right hands. I look: among them is an acquaintance of mine. I walk up to him. It works. All around there's turmoil. Here — indifference. My acquaintance greets me. I ask him what they're doing here. They have been coming here from Pruszków for several days already to dig potatoes. I ask: Wouldn't it be possible to join them. He gives me his shovel immediately.

"Try it, maybe you'll pass."

I take the shovel in my hand. After all, I have my own sack. I didn't think I was particularly conspicuous. My people, our people from Warsaw, are jostling and swarming in floods. Everything takes only a moment. We are going. The German checks from memory. Everyone: *Links*!… I can already see. But I'm afraid. Halina. Zocha. With those sacks. White ones on their backs. Will it work? No-oo. Fear of… what?… a beating?… In my nose the smell of a miracle… treason. But! In the first place. To leave my own people! Practically without an arrangement. Nothing. Yes. Already. They've barely noticed. It's not important. I don't know. Suddenly I'm shoved to the right, something like "*fafluchter*" and nothing else, no digging, back to the transport, I immediately gave back the shovel, farewell, Pruszków freedom — Halina again — the white sacks, Zocha, Papa. The herds. And already I am among them. Who noticed? No one. And Halina? No. I was certain then. But I felt like a traitor. Disgusting. From them. Here comes the punishment. We're moving already. Nothing happened. What else was there? Taking our places? After all, we just boarded an open flatbed car. It began drizzling. It was gray. A long time. Sad. Suddenly, nothing matters. Where to? What is it? Stupid tracks — tracks — to eat… — Włochy — a stop. From the streets, from the windows, from platforms, from stairs, people throw large quantities of carrots, onions, radishes, beets at us. The Germans do nothing. We grab. Father and I, too. An onion. Crunch. At once. Half of it. Raw. Father devoured it immediately. I couldn't. We were moving. Very slowly. Very very slowly. Past Warsaw. A sensation! What happened in Piastów? In Ursus? It was drizzling. Tossing of vegetables from the platforms. Dusk. Small clusters of observers-helpers.

We rode on and on. Those fifteen kilometers. In those cars. Red. From under a Christmas tree. (When I was four, I got a freight train with four freight cars. I know that one was for coal and one, a very

long one, for lumber. My family and I were riding now in the one for coal.) There was already a dense crowd in Pruszków. Get out. Lots of jumping, crawling, shouting. Because not only were there a lot of us. But also many people who were waiting. Germans. And our people from the RGO — the Central Welfare Council for helping with survival, serving soup. And from the Red Cross. From the tracks we went directly to the right into the flow of an organized line. And we set off walking into the interior, into the Pruszków railway yards, industrial sites, now — camps; because first there were concrete fences, tracks under foot, and then depots, depots, and still more depots. The camp was a depot. Meaning, the camp was multiple depots. A series of depots had begun already back in Ursus. Similar ones. Not these. It's correct that after Włochy there's Ursus. After Ursus, Piastów. And only after Piastów comes Pruszków. I associated it with colored pencils. Because Pruszków got its start from that industry and from those pencils. At least that's the reason it's a city with a station. The right part. The one where we — a transport— transmission — or rather, a constant stroke, stroke, stroke after stroke, dragged on — it was that part, the right one, the lesser Pruszków, with less pseudo-Gothic than the left.

Germans. Schmucks. We — a transport. To the depots. A conveyor belt. Was it raining? If so, then very little, it wasn't visible. We walked. At once we encountered. These characters. Every meter, every half meter. From the Red Cross, from the RGO. On this side and that. We were walking ever so slowly. Under our feet, who knows what. They stood in place. Wearing coats. To be recognized. Because it was clearer. And clearer. And calling out. Aloud. Addresses. Names. Seeking. All the time. Left. Right. Left. Right. Left. Right. Addresses, names. They're making announcements. Constantly. The ones in the coats, from the right and the left, by turns. The Germans pass them, the ones from our group, with rifles. And we trudge on and on.

"35 Marszałkowska. Jadwiga Szamotulska."
"18 Chmielna. Andrzej Polkowski."
"5 Bracka. Zofia Węgrzyn."
"Malwina Kociela, 5 Mazowiecka."
"8 Napoleon Square."
"13 Grójecka. Pelagia Wąchocka."
"Antoni Marzec. Artur Marzec."
"Malawski… 2 Chopin Street."
"Kazimierz Czeladź."
"35 Hoża."
"Jadwiga Penetrowa, 12 Poznańska."
"Mieczysława Puchałowska."
"43 Wspólna."

“Zenon Kołodziej.”

“Jerzy Burza, 94 Marszałkowska.”

“Jerzy and Barbara Poroscy, 5 Złota.”

“Borowska Barbara, 5 Chmielna.”

Why couldn’t I fend off thoughts about All Souls’ Day? Because we were walking in a crowd, just as one leaves the cemetery on All Souls’ Day, between statues of angels that were palely glimmering (because it was already dark) and tombstones of ancestors laid out in rows. The strangest thing was that during that whole time no one, but no one, neither ahead of us nor behind us, answered the roll call; no one stopped or even looked around. Total indifference.

My All Souls’ Day metaphor was definitely not a metaphor at all. And if it was, then I’ve never experienced one more strongly.

We enter new terrain. If I say roundhouse number 5 for steam locomotives but minus the locomotives, that will explain nothing. Exactly: a new terrain, without edges, without end, and not so much dark as filled with a crowd of people entering, separating, and arranging things, crouching down with candles in separate plots… Exactly as in Powązki, the sections divided by paths and each plot having as many graves as belong together; on each grave candles and a family tidying things up or sitting there talking and praying together… So, after leaving a cemetery (Bródno or Powązki) we enter a cemetery — the natural order reversed. For a long time I couldn’t believe that this was not a cemetery and not All Souls’ Day. Even when the Germans and their helpers had already settled us in some kind of billet on something… or maybe simply on the bare concrete; the stones were built and continued to be built, it seemed, of bundles and valises. Because Halina and I immediately started looking around for a board to sleep on.

“I just need to stretch out,” I say to her.

“I’m counting on that, too; let’s find something.”

We went to the farther reaches of the depot. We looked about to left and right. Everywhere, crowds, gravestones, candles, bustle, and noise reverberating against the walls and the roof of the hall. Something like a wall in the same color as that space emerged into view; I made it out, I think, by its gloss or by some intensification of its shadow, because yes, the general murk was diffused. The ceilings were harder to make out.

We came upon a strange wing with a railroad track under which was a pit (as it’s called professionally) for repairing the undercarriage. At the end of the track was a shed. In the shed we found a long wide board.

“Ideal,” said Halina.

We grabbed our treasure. What luxury! And completely happy we

carried it back to our family gravestone, which wasn't so easy to find right away. We stretched out to sleep at once. It was great. For the time being we had nothing else on our mind. We also ate something Zocha gave us, and so on this unremitting All Souls' Day, in a gigantic depot, the unfinished first day of the non-uprising came to its end for us.

In the morning it was completely different. Not at all like All Souls' Day. The smell of tracks, of the depot; people. Bombs were not falling on our heads. For the time being no one was driving us out to work. Not even to a transport. We found out that the RGO was distributing soup, that there was a lot, that it was good, that it was made with tomatoes and potatoes. We ran over. The lines in front of the barrels of soup moved quickly. They poured out full bowls. Warm, fragrant, real tomato soup with potatoes. We devoured it. They announced seconds. Again we devoured it.

There was an awful lot of soup. Always good. Barrel wagons or tank trucks would drive up. I don't know what they were exactly, and they would pour as much as you wanted. That's how it was throughout our entire stay. Until I developed diarrhea and was running to the large, long latrine in which there was always a crowd.

From depot 5 they transferred us to another depot.

In addition to eating, running to the latrine, sleeping, and talking, there was also aimless moving around out of boredom. I saw on these occasions countless commotions with negotiations going on in small groups between the evacuees and the people from the RGO and the Polish Red Cross. There was endless traffic through the gate. Male and female nurses were carrying some people out on stretchers and walking others outside. I concluded that there was a lot of pretense in front of the Germans. I was angry at my own people that they were so rich but weren't active. Because as it turned out— money was important. Until I was struck dumb with amazement. It became obvious to me suddenly on the second day, I think. We went to a small side annex. I didn't know why so many people were going there and why we were. Until I noticed an opening in the brick wall, or a small window, in front of which Zocha, Halina, and Father were standing. I didn't know what they were looking at. I noticed vertically, just as at a shooting gallery, a part of the corner house, the roadway, and the sidewalk. From behind the corner an elegantly dressed man in a hat walked out and turned the corner in the sunshine. He was simply going for a walk. So outside of Warsaw there was the normal course of life and business under the occupation…

At that moment a woman, one of "them," walked up to the little window from the street side. She and Zocha and Halina said something to each other through the opening. They gave her

something.

A moment later I saw in their hands a slab of butter.

“So money’s being used now?” I inquired of Halina.

“Naturally.”

“And it’s important?”

“Yes.” Father nodded.

Of course. Why should money have been unimportant outside of Warsaw? Here they hadn’t had to barter, to build a stove out of three bricks. Here there was no primitive cave community.

We were able to stay on in Pruszków. And the cleverest among us arranged things that way. After all, what was there to rush off to? Forced labor? But Halina infected Zocha and Stacha once again with the idea that “the sooner the better.” My father followed them. He felt a great deal of affection for Halina; he was really attached to her; and even knowing her weak side — that she’s an opportunist and doesn’t take any risks (which she herself confirms), and that she and Zocha were always carrying suitcases because they had to have several changes of underwear — still, he respected and even admired her.

We decided to report for selection already on Thursday, October 6, in the afternoon. Selections were taking place continually. Between those who were fit for work and those who were suited only for distribution among the villages of the Generalgouvernement. The Wi. family, with Jadzia, the aunt, the mother, and the two children, stood beside us in the line of people four abreast. They told each other: “You take the little girl, I’ll take him.” And that’s what they did; a sole guardian of a child also wasn’t fit for labor. The segregation went quick as could be. A number of Germans shouted, asked questions, selected, and supervised — two lines of these most important men. To the left, the Generalgouvernement; to the right, the Reich. Stacha held on tightly to Halina. A German wanted to send her to the Generalgouvernement as too old. Stacha grabbed Halina’s arm when she heard this.

“No-oo… together,” and she was already in our line, and already we were moving toward the gate, past the gate, and to the freight cars.

Red freight cars, so-called pigpens. There were sixty of us in ours. They locked us in. The train moved. We were packed in. Still, we banged against each other slowly. Suddenly a problem arose: the need to pee. And what joy: there was a huge golden bucket. It was already circulating. You had to pee in front of everyone. Which we were used to doing. What was worse, was that I couldn’t — and I really wanted to — get started because of the rocking of the car. I stood there and stood there with the bucket. I grew nervous. That I’d lose my turn if I gave it back with nothing, but finally I’d have to give it back because

so many were waiting. A quarter of an hour later I succeeded. New happiness.

Then we lay down on our bundles and — as we were waking up — daylight was entering from high above, through a narrow window. People climbed up and peered out through the window to see where we were. Halina also peered out, wearing her coat with the ash-gray collar.

“Apparently we passed Łódź earlier.” That’s all that was known for now.

So for the time being no one saw anything. Gradually we figured out that they were taking us to Lower Silesia.

The train stopped at last. It was morning. A time of urgent needs. Those near the door drummed on it. Until the bolts grated and we hurled ourselves out. Everyone leaped from all the cars. I squatted down beside Halina. Along the entire length of the train — in four rows — people squatted to relieve themselves without blinking an eye. Then a leap back into the cars for our things and they ordered us to line up for a march.

At a station with several tracks, with wooden beams stacked on one side, we read the sign: “Lamsdorf.” Łambinowice today.

They led us out into the countryside. The first real landscape. Warm. Without explosions. Since the whole pre — August 1 epoch. After a while we were allowed to rest. Everyone collapsed, with bundles, suitcases, wherever they happened to drop, under the bushes, the trees, among the heather. It was in full bloom. People lay down, stretched, rejoiced, inhaled, sighed.

Finally they led us in through a gate and down a long, wide avenue to the camp, which was surrounded by barbed wire. In the camp grounds there were trees, grass, hillocks. It seemed peaceful here, and pleasant, exceptionally so for a camp. Along both sides of the avenue were earthworks, which were overgrown with greenery. A dozen or so years after the war those earthworks were opened accidentally. It turned out that there were corpses in them. That’s why there were earthworks there.

The camp stretched far into the distance, because we turned into another avenue and walked to the areas reserved for POWs of various nationalities. I was seeing a prisoner of war camp for the first time. I hadn’t imagined that there’d be such a small plot of land around each barracks for so many people, and then wires, and the next “run.” They were like runs in a zoo. Cages.

They led those of us from the train into a wire-enclosed space without barracks, without anything. Or maybe into several little reserves, or otherwise we wouldn’t have fit in. (Or, rather, we would have all fit, since the Hitlerites relied on literally jamming everyone

together into a single mass.)

To the left we had Poles, from 1939. After them, Frenchmen. Farther on, Englishmen, Belgians, and other nationalities. Russians, too. We immediately became a sensation. The French threw colorful trifles over to us. Something to eat. Razor blades. The prisoners of war were sufficiently well cared for, shaved — at least, that's how it seemed on the surface and at that time. The Poles from 1939 said that now it was peaceful there. Father remembers that they mentioned something about a worse time, now past.

I asked one of the officers — they were officers only, I think— when they'd learned about the uprising.

"The first day, in the evening."

"Right away?"

"The radio," he explained.

They began taking us to the baths in groups. People referred to it then as "Going to the mikvah."

Once more we walked quite a long way, through meadows. Near the barracks with the "mikvah" there were plenty of Ukrainians, prisoners of war, moving about. They assisted us in bathing. Or rather — a locker room, showers, standing about — and we were led out.

The bath was like any other. Only one detail. Lice control. And compulsory advice. That on a pole in the center there is a gray ointment. Everyone must take some and smear it on his hair, in his armpits and in the third place. It's a little embarrassing but I will introduce here a popular song from the occupation:

Gray ointment is the greatest,
You only use a little.
Simply rub it everywhere,
And your balls will shrivel…

When we were united with the women again on the road Halina told me that they were also attended by Ukrainians, by men only. They walked among the naked women checking the showers, laughing and chatting.

"So? Do you think all the women were offended?"

"Were they?"

"Not in the least. They also grinned and arranged with the Ukrainians for rendezvous."

As we set out on the semicircular road a group of people in special uniforms, mainly khaki, appeared beyond the bend, carrying knapsacks, rucksacks, and haversacks. They were the partisans. Who had just been transported here. We were walking under armed guard. They were, too. We were walking toward each other. Rising excitement. Noise. So — we pass each other. Shouts. Cries. The Germans drive us onward, they yell. They were leading them to the

“mikvah.” Us to the side of the road for the time being. We waited in place for a while. It was late afternoon. Warm. The partisans were led out of the “mikvah” and lined up beside the road in the meadow, but far from us. At first they just stood there. But then they were ordered to take something, perhaps everything, out of their packs and knapsacks. Then — the sun was just going down — the partisans undressed at a command. Then it became fairly dark and we were sent down the road to our new quarters. We saw them standing there and standing there, stripped down to their underwear for the time being. There was nothing ominous — despite this — in the warm breeze. And yet, as we know, after dark they had to strip naked and wait. What happened later — is hard to determine. Some were taken elsewhere. Some came back. Survived. But the others — no one knows what happened. They vanished. Were they silently taken off somewhere to the side that night? Or later? It’s never been completely explained.

This time they led us into a spacious compound on a hill with greenery, grass, trees, separated from the rest of the camp and practically bordering on the highway and fields of turnips and potatoes along the sides of the valley.

Several spacious tents awaited us. When we entered our tent we discovered that we were to sleep on a thick rough layer of shavings. They were arranged in two rows with an aisle between them. The shavings were warm. Anyway, the night was warm, too.

They gave us something to eat. But we added leftovers from our Warsaw supplies. We had juice, macaroni, sugar cubes. We ate some uncooked food and went to sleep.

We began to cook only on the morning of the second day. On stoves made of three bricks, on real little stoves — I don’t know where they came from — but maybe those weren’t really stoves, just whatever we’d brought with us. Zocha and Stacha also cooked macaroni, although toward evening Zocha was standing in front of the kasha cauldron as a server. After one portion of thick soup I brought my mess kit over for seconds because Zocha winked at me, and she poured me a brimming ladleful.

During the day we got a good look at the terrain. We liked it very much. The weather was fine to boot, and warm all the time. Beyond the string of tents, or, rather, as if beyond the courtyard of this new household, was a patch of heather. Whoever wasn’t cooking or wasn’t in the tents went off to sit there. Halina and I also sat and chatted there. We felt good, as if we were on a school outing.

Toward evening, as was my habit, I took a careful walk around. It was roomy and country-like in the tents. Outside, in the “yard,” people were either rushing or sauntering around. On the edge of the

yard opposite the tents was a ditch and a rise covered with bushes. Near the ditch was a row of steaming cookstoves; the Warsaw women were preparing supper individually. Just behind the stoves children were playing. And behind the children, against the background of bushes above the ditch, on the long plank benches of a field latrine, men were sitting in a row and shitting. From the end of the courtyard, from the last, smallest tent came a pious song but not one such as we were accustomed to. I deduced that those were the Russians from Warsaw, ours, civilians. They always stuck together in a separate group. And always last in their line was a man pushing a cart with quilts, bundles, and a sewing machine on the top. They had gotten a separate tent. I peered inside: in the corner of the tent, under an icon and candles, stood a crowd gathered into a triangular mass, crossing themselves every now and then, bowing and singing Orthodox Vespers.

In the evening, when we had all lain down already on the reed mats and shavings in our tent, we got in a mood to organize a cultural evening. One man stood in the aisle between the shavings and recited Wiech; another man, young, played a Wieniawski concerto on his violin.[29]

During the night a storm blew up and during the downpour several Varsovians stole past the wires to dig turnips.

On Sunday we sat in the heather practically all day long.

Transport selections took place almost daily. The Germans came over, the interpreter made an announcement, asked, explained. It was announced to what destination a particular group was being sent now — and volunteers were called for. You could choose not only whether you wanted to go to a *Bauer* or a factory but also how far away. We immediately decided against a *Bauer*:

On a Bauer howls a dog
Fed on slops meant for a hog.
We wanted a city.

I insisted that it should be as near as possible to the border of the Generalgouvernement in order to escape to Częstochowa at the first opportunity. Halina was dreaming of Vienna. She liked to sing:

I've lost my heart
Which someone stole in Vienna…

I said that that was frivolous at such a time, and it was also so far away. But she replied: "But I want to go there and that's all; you're drawn to Częstochowa because of your love affairs."

And so one more separation was in the making. Father didn't want to part with me, or Stacha and Zocha with Halina. But Zocha didn't want to lose Father, and Father also depended on Zocha's and Halina's company — very much so, in fact. So that later, in Opole, he

ate practically nothing from grief at the separation.

On Monday before noon new groups kept leaving. Until the call came: “Who wants to go to Opole?”

Father and I volunteered. Halina remained stubborn. Vienna—and that’s that. And so we said goodbye hastily. And off we went with our white knapsacks, with the rest of the macaroni and sugar, into the train. That was October 9. On November 11, after one month of work as bricklayers’ assistants on the expansion of a gasworks in Oppeln, Father and I escaped to Częstochowa. During the first snowstorm. Thanks to someone from Częstochowa who had come for us on a circuitous route through Berlin.

The first person from the uprising whom I saw suddenly one evening near a kiosk in Częstochowa was Swen’s mother, and the second was Swen, who was holding her by her arm.

I saw what remained of Warsaw in February 1945.

NOTES

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

1 Prior to writing his memoir, Białoszewski had published four volumes of poetry and small prose narratives: *Obroty rzeczy* (1956), *Rachunek zachciankowy* (1959), *Mylne wzruszenia* (1961), and *Było i było* (1965). These were followed by *Donosy rzeczywistości* (1973), *Teatr osobny* (1973), *Wiersze* (1975), *Poezje wybrane* (1976), *Szumy, zlepy, ciągi* (1976), *Zawał* (1977), *Odczepić się* (1978), *Rozkurz* (1980), *Wiersze wybrane i dobrane* (1980), *Przepowiadanie sobie* (1981), *Trzydzieści lat wierszy* (1982), *Stara proza: Nowe wiersze* (1984), *Oho* (1985), and, posthumously, *Obmapywanie Europy*. *AAAmeryka: Ostatnie wiersze* (1988), *Konstancin* (1991), *Chamowo* (2009), and *Tajny dziennik* (2012).

2 Czesław Miłosz, ed. and trans., *Postwar Polish Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

3 Joseph Alsop, "Boguslaw Sent Me," *The Boston Globe*, June 6, 1959.

A MEMOIR OF THE WARSAW UPRISING

1 "Vlasovites" refers to military units composed of Ukrainian, Russian, and Central Asian volunteers and conscripts fighting under German command. In September 1944 the former Red Army general Andrei Vlasov (1901–1946) was granted permission to organize and recruit these troops into a Russian Liberation Army (ROA) under his command. Białoszewski uses the term "Vlasovites" to refer also to the ruthless units of the Russian People's Liberation Army (RONA) under the command of Bronisław Kamiński, who were primarily responsible for the rapes at Zieleniak and other atrocities committed against civilians.

2 The Polish term "Secession style" refers to the influence of the Viennese Secession movement on Art Nouveau art and architecture in Poland during the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. Most of these elaborately ornamented buildings in Warsaw were destroyed during the war.

3 *The Wedding*, a 1901 play by Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907), a representative of the Young Poland movement, satirizes the mystical expectations of national restoration with which turn-of-the-century Polish intellectuals masked their basic inertia; Stańczyk, the court jester to King Sigismund I (1467–1548), appears in the play as a figure out of Poland's legendary past.

4 There were many elegant Wedel's cafés in Warsaw, operated by the E. Wedel confectionary firm, which continued to produce its line of fine chocolates throughout the war, selling to civilians and

supplying the German occupying forces.

5 The original name of Bank Square was restored after the collapse of the communist government in 1989.

6 The People's Army (Armia Ludowa, or AL), officially organized in January 1944, comprising units that had been operating under Communist control in occupied Poland since 1942. The AL joined the uprising on August 2, 1944.

7 The Home Army (Armia Krajowa, or AK), composed of partisan units that began operating in occupied Poland (under both the German and Soviet occupations) from the start of the war, was formally placed under the authority of the Polish government-in-exile in February 1942. It was the chief resistance force in Poland throughout the war and the largest underground army in Europe.

8 On this "Black Monday," the Luftwaffe launched its first major air attack of World War II on an open city, flying more than a thousand sorties and dropping more than five hundred tons of bombs on Warsaw to force the capitulation of the capital's defensive forces. Warsaw was occupied two days later.

9 Ratusz — etymologically from German *Rathaus*—is the old town hall.

10 Andrzej Wajda's *Kanal* (1957) is perhaps the best-known cinematic dramatization of the partisans' descent into the Warsaw sewers. One of the film's most famous scenes shows the fleeing partisans taking a wrong turn and winding up at a sewer exit blocked with barbed wire strung with grenades.

11 Goliaths, like Tigers, were robot tanks under radio control by German soldiers.

12 The turning point of the 1920 Russo — Polish War took place on August 15, when embattled Polish forces succeeded in repelling Red Army troops at the outskirts of Warsaw. Since the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is celebrated on August 15, believers attributed the seemingly miraculous victory to the intercession of Mary, Queen of Poland.

13 The November 1830 uprising was a doomed revolt by Polish officers against the tsarist Russian occupying forces.

14 Mazovian princes were the medieval rulers of Mazovia, Poland's north-easternmost region; Staś is Stanisław II August (1732–1798), the last king and grand duke of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1764–1795), during whose reign Polish territory was subjected three times to partition among Russia, Austria, and Prussia, after which it ceased to exist as an independent state until it was reconstituted in 1918. Jan III Sobieski (1629–1696) was elected king of Poland in 1674; he led a combined force of Polish, German, and Austrian troops to defeat Turkish armies at the Battle of Vienna in

1683. The Saxon kings — August II (1670–1733) and his son Augustus III (1696–1762) — elected like the other kings of Poland, were rulers over both Poland and Saxony. The Vasas are Sigismund III Vasa (1566–1632), the king of Poland (1587–1632) and of Sweden (1592–1599), and his son Władysław IV Vasa (1595–1648), who were descendants of Gustav Eriksson, the progenitor of the Swedish royal House of Vasa. Fukier is the name of a prominent merchant family dating back to the sixteenth century. Marysieńka, Queen Marie-Casimire (1641–1716), was the beloved French-born wife of Jan III Sobieski and the mother of fourteen of his children.

15 Bolesław Prus (pseudonym of Aleksander Głowacki, 1847–1912), was one of Poland's leading nineteenth-century writers. His novel *The Doll* (*Lalka*, 1890) and his *Weekly Chronicles* contain realistic portrayals of Warsaw life. Prus was among those Polish Positivists who rejected the romantic tradition of the grand gesture of (inevitably failed) rebellion and argued for the organic, pragmatic development of Polish society and economy as the most effective way to counter the heavy hand of Russian rule.

16 Lieutenant Radosław, the pseudonym of Jan Mazurkiewicz, was a career officer who served in the Polish Legions in World War I and as a leader of the AK during the Warsaw Uprising. Since Radosław is a common first name, the author makes a point of distinguishing the partisan he saw from the famous military leader.

17 "Yon Valyon" is, of course, the ex-convict Jean Valjean, the hero of Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), who carried an injured fighter on his back from the barricades through the sewers of Paris after the failure of the 1832 insurrection.

18 "What happened in Wola" was the massacre by German forces of some forty to fifty thousand civilians and partisans in the Wola district during the early days of the uprising.

19 A writer and communist activist, Wanda Wasilewska (1905–1964) spent the war years in the Soviet Union as a propagandist broadcasting to Poland and assisting in the organization of a Polish division within the Red Army. She chose to remain in the USSR after the war.

20 Bolesław Woytowicz (1899–1980), a composer and pianist, ran the Salon of Art, a Warsaw café where during the war he organized classical music concerts as a way of supporting younger musicians. Performances of Chopin's music carried a message of national pride.

21 Wojciech Bąk (1907–1961) was a minor lyric poet, primarily of religious verse.

22 Stanisław Mikołajczyk (1901–1966) was the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile from July 1943 until his resignation in November 1944. After the war, as the leader of the Polish People's

Party (PSL), an agrarian-based, anticommunist party, he joined the first unity government as the deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture, resigning in 1947 and fleeing to the West after faked elections that spelled the end of the PSL and the beginning of the brutal imposition of Stalinist control in the country.

23 "With smoke from the fires" are the opening words of "Chorale," a patriotic hymn and summons to battle against Poland's oppressors written by Kornel Ujejski (1823–1897) in the aftermath of the failed insurrection of 1846. It became an unofficial national anthem in the divided Polish lands until reunification. It begins, "With smoke from the fires, with the dust of our brothers' blood / We raise our voice to Thee, Lord."

24 The Bar Confederation (1768–1772) was an armed association of Polish magnates in southeastern Poland and Ukraine, formed to defend against Russian influence and Stanisław II August's attempts to limit the power of the magnates. The result of this insurrection was civil war, Russian intervention, a bloody peasant uprising, and eventually the first partition of Poland.

25 In the Battle of Głogów (August 24, 1109), the armies of the Holy Roman Empire under the leadership of King Henry V of Germany were defeated by the armies of Duke Bolesław II Krzywousty of the Kingdom of Poland — a much-celebrated victory of Polish arms.

26 The Generalgouvernement, established in accordance with a decree by Hitler in October 1939, was the area of occupied Poland that was not directly incorporated into the Reich but was ruled as a separate administrative district.

27 *Miracle in Milan* is Vittorio De Sica's 1951 film about a miracle of prosperity coming to the inhabitants of a shantytown in war-ravished Italy.

28 In the narrative poem *Konrad Wallenrod* by Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), the historical figure Konrad von Wallenrode (c. 1330–1393), the twenty-fourth grand master of the Teutonic Knights, is portrayed as a Lithuanian patriot who disguised his loyalty to Lithuania in order to rise to the position of power that enabled him to lead the knights into a disastrous defeat.

29 Wiech, the pseudonym of Stefan Wieniecki (1896–1979), called the "Homer of the Warsaw streets," was known for his feuilletons and humorous sketches of Warsaw life. Henryk Wieniawski (1835–1880) was a violinist and composer; his dazzling Concerto No. 2 in D minor is known as one of the great Romantic violin concertos.

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To view high-resolution versions of Maps 1 and 2, please visit New York Review Books online.

Places Miron Białoszewski Stayed and His Movements During the Uprising

LEGEND

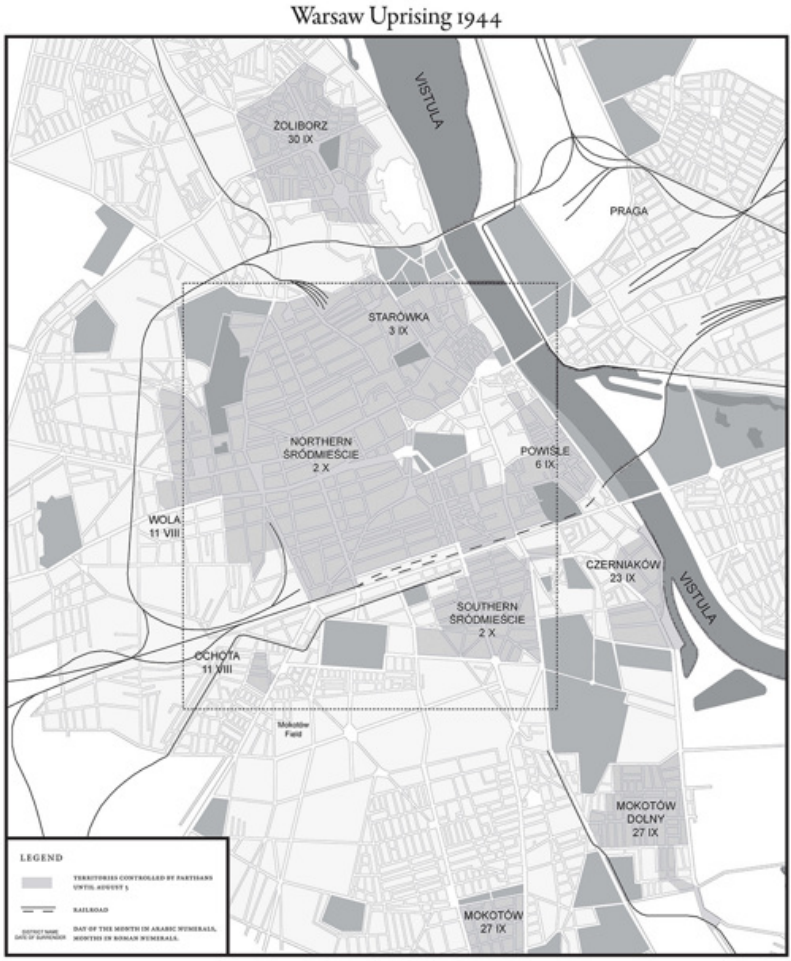
- CHRISTIAN CEMETERIES
- JEWISH CEMETERY
- PARKS AND GARDENS
- BUILDINGS
- RAILROAD
- STREET ROUTE
- SEWER ROUTE
- BOUNDARIES OF THE FORMER GHETTO
- CHURCHES
- MANHOLE

M.B.'s PLACES OF REFUGE

1. 40 Chłodna – where M.B. lived (1942–1944); he left on August 1 and returned for a moment on August 6
2. 24 Chłodna – the apartment of Irena D., M.B.'s colleague from the secret Polish literature classes; August 1 – August 6/7
3. 19/16 Rybaki – the cellar in Swen's mother's building; August 7 – August 26
4. 19 Miodowa – the ruins of the Chodkiewicz Palace; August 26 – September 1
5. 30 Chmielna – the cellar of the building where M.B.'s father lived with Zocha, Stacha, and Halina; September 1/2–September 6
6. 10 Wilcza and the cellars of the apartment house at 13 Wilcza – residence until the end of the uprising, September 7 – October 3

PLACES VISITED BY M.B.

- A 43 Ogrodowa – Aunt Józia's building, August 6
- B 16 Bielańska – Aunt Limpcia and Granny Frania's apartment, August 13
- C The well at 3 Podwale
- D Uncle Stefan's primshop on Górski Street
- E The corner of Chmielna and Zgoda Streets, the night of September 5–6
- F Nowogrodzka Street between Bracka and Kruczą Streets, the night of September 6–7
- G 6 Żurawia – the family home of Zdzisław Iliwicki, M.B.'s schoolmate
- H The mill on Prosta Street, past Żelazna Street; the foray in search of grain
- I Żurawia Street – site of the visit with Swen
- J Emilia Plater Street – the patricians' quarters



*http://bit.ly/WarsawMap1
**http://bit.ly/WarsawMap2